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**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

The Linguistic Attractiveness of Languages: A Case
Study with the Instances of English, German, Spanish
and Portuguese in the Swiss Canton of Geneva.

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English Linguistics Master's Thesis

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Spring Semester

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Value of Languages

The question I will investigate in this master project concerns the potential value languages can have for Genevan parents when the formers educate linguistically their children. Indeed, when parents instruct their children with one or more language(s), it seems legitimate to examine if, behind this decision, motivations stem out concerning the precise choice of the language transmitted. Switzerland, and above all the canton of Geneva, represent well the notion of multilingualism. The country hosts four official languages, and among the 26 Swiss cantons, Geneva is the most linguistically diverse (Stanford, “n.d.”, 4). With this situation in mind, the city is a good field of experiments to determine if among the parents, certain trends stand out regarding the choice of the languages they transmit to their children.

Indeed, there are different factors to consider concerning the transmission of a language. Depending on the family, not all the languages spoken by the parents are transmitted to the children; in other cases, some languages not known by the latter may also end up being mastered by the children. What stems out of my research is that three main elements can be considered when parents select the language they will transmit to their child:

- 1) The communicative value: if a language is widely spoken, parents may want their children to master this language for their future.
- 2) The economic value: depending on the place, languages may be valued in some professional domains – for instance, this would be the case for German in the

French-speaking part of Switzerland. Therefore, some languages would be sought-after by parents.¹

- 3) The personal value parents have with the language: parents may decide to transmit their native language to their child since they clearly identify with this language and may use it for daily communication. It would also allow the child to communicate with relatives.

Different questions may arise when turning to the languages transmitted by the parents. In the case of 3), if parents do not share the same native language, the question that would arise would concern which language will be transmitted. Another situation would be where none of the parents is a native speaker of a language, but this language nevertheless ends up being taught to the child. This precise case could richly inform on the value a language has; why would a language not initially mastered by the parents be taught to the child? Hence, it seems that more than familial reasons, the advantages a language can bring matters when parents are to choose a language for their children. Therefore, based on the study of a survey carried out by our team from the English Department of the University of Geneva in 2022², I intend to study the potential value of a language by considering the linguistic composition of the couples interrogated and comparing it with the language(s) their child ends up speaking.

The aim of this research will be to grasp the attractiveness of the language – in other words, if there is a language that parents would like more their children to master. For the sake of the study, our analysis will consider three different categories of languages, each one considering a language that is well represented in Switzerland and

¹ More information on this topic will be given in the “Literature Review” section.

² More information about our study and our team will be presented in the "Research Design" section.

that corresponds to a certain group; these groups of languages are based on Abram de Swaan's study *Words of the World* (2001) and entail:

1) A language that responds to communicative and professional benefits, such as English that is highly looked for, if not almost mandatory nowadays on the employment market as it is the world's *lingua franca*.

2) A language that is contextually highly valuable but that is not considered as the worldwide language. In our case, it will be German: a language that does not impose itself as the world's *lingua franca* but that still counts many speakers in Europe and that is linguistically close to the most widely spoken Swiss national language.³ The case of German is opportune in this local study because whereas in other countries the value of German may not have been interesting, in Switzerland due to its position as an official language, the idiom may be valuable in French-speaking cantons.

Alongside German, Spanish is also an interesting case since this language possesses a great attractiveness and value due to its geographical extension: indeed, Spanish is the official language of 20 countries and is spoken by 420 million people.⁴

3) Lastly, a language that would be considered as a heritage language in Switzerland: Portuguese. In Switzerland, there are great odds that if none of the parents speak that language, the child will not especially acquire it. Portuguese has the particularity of being one of the most spoken Swiss non-national languages in the country. Even though it is the official language of around ten countries in the world, and is spoken

³ It is necessary to point out that although the Swiss Constitution mentions German as the national language, Swiss German does not correspond to the "traditional" form and is more of a dialectal form with many phonological, lexical, and syntactical differences.

⁴ Vistawide *World Languages and Culture*, n.p., 2004. Web. 4 January 2023: https://www.vistawide.com/languages/top_30_languages.htm.

by around 213 million speakers⁵, it is also a language that does not seem to be required in the local employment market. However, it is necessary to qualify this statement concerning Portuguese; Portuguese is considered by Abram de Swaan (2001) to be a supercentral language, i.e., a language that is highly widespread and to which speakers in specific geographical areas turn for a common means of communication. Therefore, although Portuguese, on a purely global scale, is a potentially sought-after language, its value and interest may be less in Switzerland.

Also, it is important to note that the choice of languages studied stems from the quality of the responses we obtained during our study. Thus, for category 2), I decided to pair German and Spanish to have more results to analyze. French was omitted on purpose since it is the official language of the canton, it would have been meaningless to study the value of transmission of a language that has great odds of being mastered by the children due to its position as community language. As for Italian, which is the third major national language, I decided not to take it in favor of Portuguese. Indeed, Italian unlike all the languages selected in this study, is not considered by de Swaan as a supercentral language. I then decided to rely on languages that own the same status according to de Swaan.

All in all, for each of the three language categories, the connection that the parents have with the language will be assessed to verify if there is a certain trend emerging regarding the transmission value of the language. Therefore, our informants will be sorted out according to the linguistic education of the couple. The four groups are: A) both native speakers, B) composed of just one native speaker, C) at least one parent mastering the

⁵ Vistawide *World Languages and Culture*, n.p., 2004. Web. 4 January 2023, https://www.vistawide.com/languages/top_30_languages.htm.

language, D) none masters the language. The following table represents the division I adopted to sort out the languages and their speakers:

	English	German	Spanish	Portuguese
A) Both native				
B) One native				
C) At least one speaks the language				
D) None speaks the language				

Table 1. Table used to sort out the four languages and their speakers of the study. The colors correspond to the three different language categories presented on page 4.

To summarize, this investigation will allow me to observe the transmission rate of the idiom through its transmission or not to the child, and *in fine* to verify if there are some languages that in Geneva in 2022 are meant to be cut or more transmitted than others and if so, why?⁶

⁶ It should be remembered that the context of writing this work will not allow me to cover every point that deserves attention. I will therefore devote myself to studying and attempting to provide a convincing explanation concerning the transmission value of the four languages previously mentioned, and this in the context of Geneva.

1.2. Approaches to Multilingualism in Switzerland and in Geneva

The purpose of this section is to present the situation of multilingualism in both Switzerland and Geneva, as well as the few legal texts that indicate the promotion of multilingualism. Switzerland is a central European country that has the distinctive characteristic of featuring four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansch (Constitution suisse, Art. 4). Besides, languages are strongly fixed in the Swiss heritage; the second article of the *Loi sur les langues* (LLC) insists that the Confederation should aim “a. to reinforce the four-speaking languages property characterizing Switzerland; b. to consolidate national cohesion; c. to encourage individual and institutional multilingualism in the practice of national languages...” (LLC, Art. 2).⁷

If we refer to the relationship between the Confederation and its national languages, the mastery of national languages is strongly encouraged within the Confederation, above all regarding the educational system:

2. As part of their attributions, the Confederation and the cantons promote teachers' and learners' multilingualism.

3. The Confederation and the cantons are committed, within the framework of their responsibilities, to foreign language teaching that ensures competence in at least one second national language and one other foreign language by the end of compulsory schooling. The teaching of national languages will consider the cultural aspects of a multilingual country” (LLC, Art.15).⁸

⁷Translation mine. Here is the original text : « a. renforcer le quadrilinguisme qui caractérise la Suisse; b. à consolider la cohésion nationale; c. à encourager le plurilinguisme individuel et institutionnel dans la pratique des langues nationales... » (LLC, Art. 2).

⁸ Translation mine. Here is the original text : « 2. Dans le cadre de leurs attributions, la Confédération et les cantons encouragent le plurilinguisme des enseignants et des apprenants.
3. La Confédération et les cantons s'engagent dans le cadre de leurs attributions en faveur d'un enseignement des langues étrangères qui, au terme de la scolarité obligatoire, assure des compétences dans une deuxième langue nationale au moins, ainsi que dans une autre langue étrangère. L'enseignement des langues nationales prendra en compte les aspects culturels liés à un pays multilingue » (LLC, Art. 15).

In addition to the language that each child should normally master because it is the language spoken in the canton, it is customary in Swiss public education to teach another national language. Since this study concerns the canton of Geneva, ensues the following article taken from the Genevan *Loi sur l'instruction publique* (LIP, Art. 15)⁹:

Art. 15 Objectives of compulsory schooling

(...)

Language policy

4 The following provisions shall apply to language policy:

- a) German is taught from the 5th primary grade;¹⁰
- b) English is taught from the 7th primary year;¹¹
- c) Italian is offered as an optional subject during compulsory education;
- d) the department supports language and culture of origin courses organized by the countries and the different linguistic communities, while respecting religious and political neutrality” (LIP, Art 15).

Hence, the country and cantonal policies efficiently tend to enforce the ideal of multilingualism through the early teaching or at least exposure to a second national language and English as a L2 from the primary school (Stanford, “n.d”, 3). Paragraph d) of the above-mentioned article of the LIP also shows that Switzerland has an equally careful relationship with languages that are not national languages. Thus, even the study

⁹ Translation mine. Here is the original version :

Art. 15 Objectifs de la scolarité obligatoire

(...)

Politique des langues

4. Les dispositions suivantes sont applicables en matière de politique des langues :

- a) l'allemand est enseigné dès la 5^e année primaire;
- b) l'anglais est enseigné dès la 7^e année primaire;
- c) une offre appropriée d'enseignement facultatif de l'italien est proposée durant la scolarité obligatoire;
- d) le département soutient les cours de langue et de culture d'origine organisés par les pays et les différentes communautés linguistiques dans le respect de la neutralité religieuse et politique » (LIP, Art 15).

¹⁰ Children are normally between 8 and 9 years old at this level.

¹¹ Children are normally between 10 and 11 years old at this level.

and transmission of languages that are not national is encouraged in a country that features a large migrant population (Stanford, “n.d.”, 3).

1.3. Historical Content of Multilingualism in Switzerland and in the Canton of Geneva

According to the Swiss historian, Marcel Heiniger (DHS, 2004), immigrants made an important contribution to the scientific, economic, and cultural life of the country. About 260'000 people immigrated to Switzerland between 1888 and 1910; most of them came from neighboring countries, with a proportion of German and French decreasing while the proportion of Italian increased.¹² From the 1950s, the Swiss economy relied on foreign workforce; the main origin of the immigrants was from Italy since they represented up to 60% of the total of the Swiss immigrants according to the Swiss historian François Walter (Walter, 2009, 102). From 1962 onwards, it is the turn of Spaniards to come and settle in Switzerland. After 1980, seasonal workers came mainly from Yugoslavia, Portugal, and Turkey. Heiniger considers that a half of the immigrants from Portugal and former Yugoslavia arrived between 1989 and 1994.

In addition to these, the second part of the 40s saw the arrival of refugees from Tibet, Hungary and Czechoslovakia who arrived in Switzerland to find asylum. The number of asylum applications reached a peak in 1991 and 1999 with the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The number of migrants from outside Europe rose from 20% in 1981 to 32% in two decades. Hence, asylum seekers deeply contributed to the great language diversity of the country; their stay in Switzerland, often limited in time,

¹² The main linguistic change to note would eventually be the proportion of speakers of a national language in a canton that does not have that language as an official language.

reflects an increased international mobility during certain stages of life (Heiniger, DHS). Walter considers that immigration is a major phenomenon of the contemporary history of Switzerland, which is among the countries relying the most on immigration in the 20th century (Walter, 2009, 103). Hence, for the 20th century at least, Switzerland heavily relied on immigration for its workforce, offering a first instance as for why various languages are spoken in Switzerland.

Also, at least in 2009, Switzerland has been considered as the most attractive business location in the world ahead of the USA and Singapore (Walter, 2009). Elements such as the international role of the Swiss franc or the financial strength of the banks are put forward by Walter to justify the attraction of Switzerland as a financial center (Walter, 2009, 104–105). Also, Swiss neutrality has been an important factor in international cooperation since 1949. In the Cold War context, Switzerland, thanks to its neutral position, succeeded in being one of the dozen founding countries of the *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire* (CERN) (Walter, 2009, 114). The country also hosts many international organizations in various areas, since it is home to 512 international governmental and non-governmental institutions (Walter, 2009, 118).

It is precisely in the canton of Geneva that the number of international organizations culminates¹³; this composition cannot but attract workforce from diverse countries around the world; the United Nations Office employs more than 1500 employees representing around 120 nationalities.¹⁴ Hence, Geneva's international dimension offers to the city the position of the most linguistically diverse of all the Swiss

¹³ For instance, the canton hosts the United Nations Office, the International Telecommunication Union, or the International Labor Organization

¹⁴ United Nations Organization. *United Nations Organizations: Practical Information*, 2023, <https://www.ungeneva.org/fr/practical-information/delegates>.

cantons (Stanford, “n.d.”, 4), making it ideal for a study on multilingualism. On its official website, the *République et Canton de Genève* offers interesting linguistic statistics that are worth comparing with the national numbers. If between 2016 and 2020, 80% of the cantonal population has for main languages French, 12,1% of the population have English as its main language. However, when working, 31% of the population turn to English; the international dimension of the canton is certainly a good reason for these numbers.¹⁵ On the other hand, at the national level, 6% of the Swiss population state that they speak English, making English the non-national language the most spoken in Switzerland.¹⁶ The other most spoken non-national languages in the country are Portuguese with 4%, Albanian with 3%¹⁷ followed by Spanish with 2%.¹⁸ Therefore, from these numbers, it is reasonable to conclude that beyond Switzerland being a multilingual country, the foreign population living in the country also contributes to the Swiss multilingualism. The following chart presents the languages that Swiss citizens indicated as being their main one.

¹⁵ Langues et religions, *Statistiques cantonales -République et Canton de Genève*, 2020, https://statistique.ge.ch/domaines/apercu.asp?dom=01_06.

¹⁶ Langues et religions, *Office fédéral de la statistique*, 2020, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/effectif-evolution.html>.

¹⁷ It is important to mention that although Albanian is one of the most represented languages in the country, I chose not to analyze it due to the absence of Albanian informants at the start of this work.

¹⁸ Langues et religions, *Office fédéral de la statistique*, 2020, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/effectif-evolution.html>.

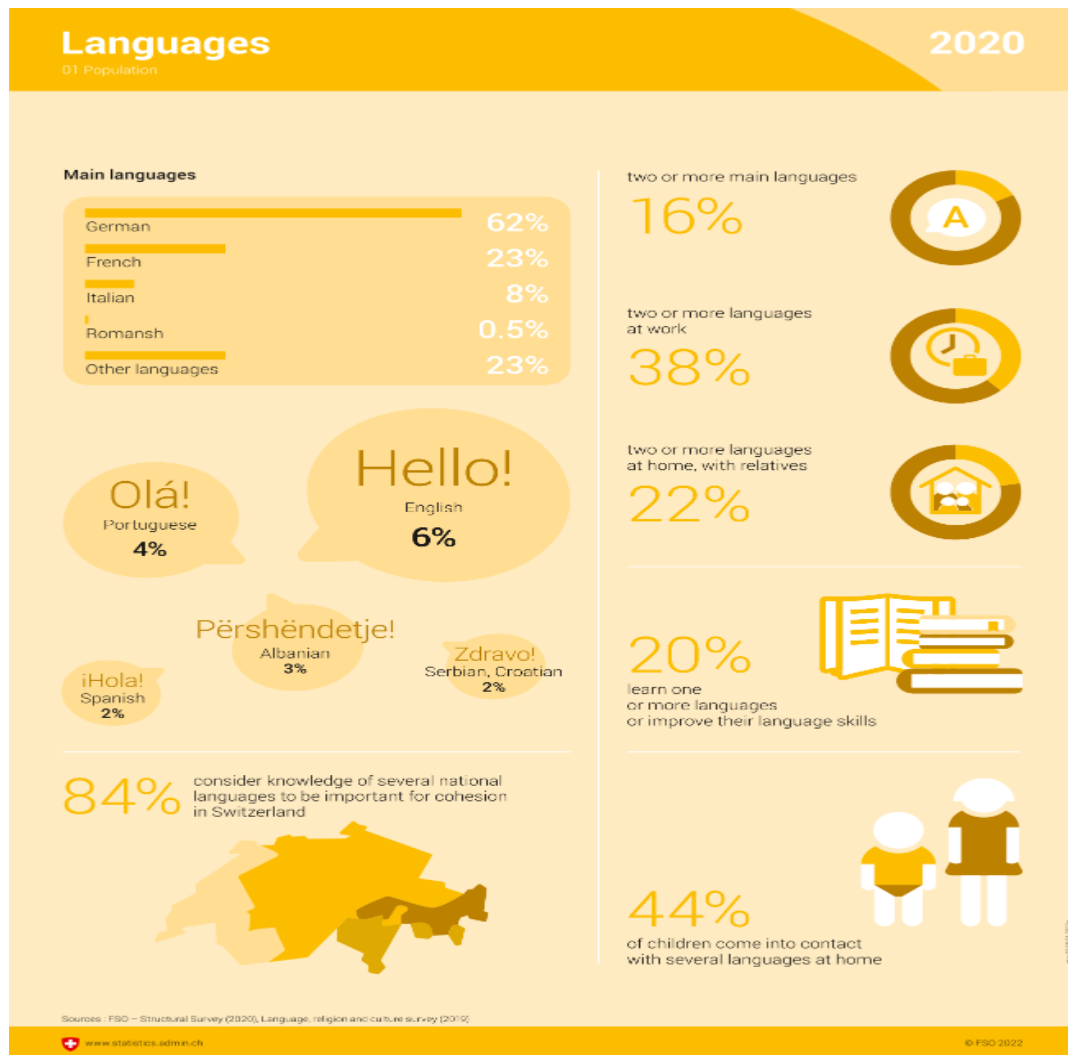


Figure 1. Repartition of the languages spoken in Switzerland.¹⁹

These languages are also well represented in Geneva, a comparison between the cantonal and national numbers even shows that these languages are even more present at the cantonal scale.

When turning to the previously mentioned languages, in the canton of Geneva, 9,7% claim to have Portuguese as their main language, 7,8% mainly speak Spanish and

¹⁹ Langues et religions, *Statistiques cantonales -République et Canton de Genève*, 2020, https://statistique.ge.ch/domaines/apercu.asp?dom=01_06.

2,2% have Albanian – it is the sole language aforementioned that possesses less speakers in Geneva compared to the rest of the country.²⁰ Therefore, both at the national and cantonal level, linguistic statistics corroborate the idea that Switzerland but above all Geneva are places worth for a study on bilingualism.

1.4.The Spreading and Perpetuation of English in Switzerland

Compared to immigration languages like Portuguese, Albanian or Spanish, English has an additional dimension that justifies a focus on its profile. By the second half of the 20th century, and due to the preeminence of the United States in a post-Cold War world, English has entered the center of a globalization process that has propelled the language to the position of *lingua franca* (Philipson, 2016, 24–25).

Before the Second World War, the average Swiss citizens had only basic knowledge of English; the Swiss historian Urs Dürmüller specifies that Swiss citizen would only acquire competences when in contact with foreigners, especially in the tourism domain (Dürmüller, “n.d.”). However, since the 60s, the situation of English in Switzerland has drastically changed. Swiss citizens are now more extensively familiar with English than with the other national Swiss languages, implying a certain change of dimension of English, from the periphery to the center of uses. Concerning the learning importance of the language, Dürmüller indicates that, in Switzerland, languages are numbered depending on the weight they are given, and the country has admitted English as a L3²¹, but unofficially, English is more considered as a L2 among the younger

²⁰ Langues et religions, *Statistiques cantonales -République et Canton de Genève*, 2020, https://statistique.ge.ch/domaines/aperçu.asp?dom=01_06.

²¹ Nowadays, this is reflected by the article 15 of the *Loi sur l'instruction publique*.

generation. Dürmüller summarizes the situation as “a *de iure* status – English as L3 – and a *de facto* status – English as L2” (Dürmüller, “n.d.”).

In a work that will study the values of linguistic transfer, it is already important to specify the linguistic profile of English by explaining what its two strengths at the Swiss level are. Evidently, these reasons could serve as an explanation for the future results of this research. At first, since English is nowadays the world’s *lingua franca* and some fields cannot do without it. When looking at the academic world, English does occupy a place that was once covered by national languages. As Dürmüller points out:

Science and research have long been singled out as fields within which English has attained a commanding presence worldwide. That is why, in Switzerland, too, the language of science tends to be English. English has become the language of and for research in Switzerland, too (Dürmüller, “n.d.”).

Thus, in areas of research and higher education, a command of English is more useful in Switzerland than other national languages. Medical, scientific domains, disciplines like psychology or social sciences and above all economics are domains in which English is abundant. However, there are still areas such as theology, law or some disciplines taught in humanities faculties, in which English is not required (Dürmüller, “n.d.”). More than for the academic domain, in the 21st century globalized world, the mastery of English in the domains of business or international trade is required (Waltermann, 2016, 75–76).²²

In the specific case of Switzerland, the second element advocating for the popularity of English is its status as a neutral language. Hence, Dürmüller presents English as an ideal *lingua franca* for the country. One first and neutral reason for this is the fact that since it is not one of the official languages of the country, it appears as a

²² The outcomes of Grin’s study on the economic benefits of mastering English and German in Switzerland will be presented in category 2. Literature Review.

single foreign language for everyone; therefore, English does not induce a hierarchy among the national languages (Dürmüller, “n.d.”). In everyday life, English is favored to national languages when people meet someone not speaking their language. The tendency for the use of English is particularly popular among the youth who clearly prefers to rely on English rather than their national L2 (Dürmüller, 1986, 357–359).

1.5. Some definitions

Definitions of some of the central concepts of this work are needed to ensure that a common understanding is shared.

1.5.1. Multilingualism or Bilingualism

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics provides as a definition of “bilingual”: “Traditionally of someone with a native or native-like control of two languages” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, “bilingual”). By extension, the adjective multilingual then considers the ability someone has of mastering more than two languages: “... of a person who has acquired more than two native languages” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, “multilingual”). It is therefore clear that this work will study the language education of parents aiming to make their children speak more than one language through early linguistic instruction.

1.5.2. Critical period

The notion of “critical period” is central to any study of children and language learning. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary of Linguistics defines the term as a: “Period of childhood when it is believed e.g. that perfect mastery of new languages can still develop” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, “critical period”). Thus, the

critical period justifies the interest that parents may have regarding the early learning of a language for their children. On this topic, the Canadian American cognitive psycholinguist Steven Pinker asserts that it is much more complicated to learn a second language as an adult than as a child (Pinker, 1994, 290). Thus, the earlier a child learns a language, the more proficient they will be in it. Pinker's research findings show that complete language acquisition can occur generally up to the age of six, after that it becomes "steadily compromised from then until shortly after puberty, and is rare thereafter" (Pinker, 1994, 293). Thus, the notion of critical period justifies why it is when children are still young that it is the most optimal time to make them learn a language.

1.5.3. Heritage Language

The term "Heritage Language" directly concerns the study of languages in the family; hence, a heritage language, as its name suggests, concerns a language acquired because of familial reasons, through inheritance. As the linguist Jim Cummins relates, in the 1970s and 1980s in Canada, the term Heritage Language was introduced to refer to the languages of the immigrants (Pericles, 2020, 1). The notion of heritage language is important because it gives a direct answer to why a language is transmitted to a child; in fact, by mastering the language of his parents, the child will be able to communicate with his relatives.

1.5.4. *Lingua Franca*

In this work, a lot will be said about English because of its status as a *lingua franca*. A *lingua franca* is a language that serves as a common means of communication for many people: "Any language used for communication between groups who have no other language in common" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, "*lingua franca*"). Thus, the American linguist William Samarin presents that throughout history many

languages have served as a common basis of communication: Common Greek from around 300 B.C. to 500 A.D., Latin during the whole Middle Ages, Arabic in the Arabic world, or Mandarin among the numerous Chinese languages (Samarin, 1987, 662–664). Nowadays, still some languages serve as *lingua franca* to very distinct degrees; the Dutch sociologist Abram de Swaan in his *Words of the World: the Global Language System* (2001) already proposes a certain value to languages according to their demographic utility.²³ Thus, Swahili is, at its level, a *lingua franca* since it serves as a means of communication for many people who are not native speakers of this language. Because of this feature, individuals will turn to this language to be able to communicate with people who do not share any common language. On a global scale, English plays this role. Thus, the parameter of *lingua franca* is a parameter to be considered to potentially estimate the value of a language since it allows a greater communicative scope.

²³ De Swaan's work will be presented and discussed in the Literature Review part of this work.

2. Literature Review

A study on the linguistic value of languages cannot be done without first referring to other recognized research. Thus, this part will be first organized around the presentation of the work of Abram de Swaan. In his book *Words of the World - the global language system* (2001), de Swaan calculates the attractiveness that a language has according to the notion of prevalence – this notion is based on its number of native speakers and the centrality of the language: the number of people who would turn to this language to communicate between speakers who do not have a common language. Some additional information provided by William Samarin (1987) will also be presented. De Swaan proposed a fundamental theory on which I will base my argument about the value of certain languages. Sarah Chevalier (2016) from the University of Zurich also proposed relevant research on the topic of language transmission; her study is important to the extent that it also looks at the transmission or disappearance of languages within families. To conclude, a section will be dedicated on the economic importance of English through the studies of the Swiss economist François Grin and the discussion stemming from the former linguistics Professor Claire Forel (2016) from the University of Geneva and the University of Geneva researchers Eva Waltermann and Virág Csillagh (2016).

Abram de Swaan's study in his book *Words of the World* (2001) is central, since it already establishes a hierarchy based on the potential value of languages in a theory called Global language system. De Swaan begins his study by presenting different categories of languages that obey a hierarchy of four categories: “peripheral”, “central”, “supercentral” and “hypercentral”. The notion of “peripheral language” will not interest us in this work but concerns roughly most of the languages in the world today. These languages are oral

and non-written versions of our languages and are the languages of conversation and narration.

This type is followed by the class of central languages. They are language spoken by everyone in everyday life; de Swaan estimates that there must be around a hundred languages, which he calls central languages. Central languages are used primarily in elementary education, but also in secondary and higher education. Thus, it is often the national and official languages of states that communicate using them (de Swaan, 2001, 4-5). Most speakers of central languages are multilingual. At first, it is highly probable that a central language speaker is fluent in what de Swaan calls peripheral languages. The other possibility is the one that will interest us most here; presumably, when a speaker tends to learn a language, it is highly probable that the choice will respect the linguistic hierarchy established by de Swaan. Thus, if a central language speaker learns a language, that language is likely to be one that is more widely spoken and higher in de Swaan's language hierarchy.

In this next stage, speakers of central languages, in general, turn to the language of the next level up: a language that has a much wider position in terms of speakers and that has the title of supercentral language (de Swaan, 2001, 5). Often, supercentral languages are used for international communication purposes. Historically, de Swaan explains that these are languages that were once imposed by a colonial power and that after the country's independence continued to be used in politics, administration, the legal system, the business world, and in higher education. There are twelve supercentral languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili (de Swaan, 2001, 5). What these languages have in common is that they all have more than a million speakers and all serve to linguistically connect speakers

of central languages (de Swaan, 2001, 5). By cross-referencing de Swaan's ranking of his central languages with William Samarin's observations on *lingua franca*, the languages considered by de Swaan to have the most value – or language prevalence – are the *lingua francas* since potential new speakers should logically turn to an idiom that allows them to communicate with most people. As an example, in Europe, at the country level, compatriots would communicate more frequently with each other using the country's national language. On the European continent, where many languages coexist, it is more likely that members of different European countries communicate with each other using a common language – this is likely to be a *lingua franca* that brings these speakers together. These twelve languages have the particularity of attracting speakers who seek international communication. Following this logic, it seems unlikely that, on a local scale, Europeans will turn to a language such as Albanian or Estonian to communicate with each other. The first reason for this choice is that as de Swaan describes it: “The larger the number of its speakers, the more attractive the language” (de Swaan, 2001, 33). Thus, since most of the speakers of these two languages are native speakers, it is unlikely that anyone who is not Estonian or Albanian speaks this language. As de Swaan presents it, if speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, German, or English meet, they will most likely make themselves understood by referring to English because it is the language that connects the supercentral languages together and “therefore constitutes the pivot of the world language system” (de Swaan, 2001, 6).

The random case of airports allows to illustrate this instance. If we take the case of Kazakhstan, and its international airport Nursultan Nazarbayev, we can see on their website that three languages are offered: Kazakh – this is the local and central language, Russian – since many Central Asian countries have historically been under Soviet

influence, Russian is therefore imposed here as supercentral language; it is the kind of *lingua franca* of the region – and finally English is also present.²⁴ This last case is a clear case of supercentral language. English is addressed to any citizen of the world seeking to find possible information on this website; it is indeed more likely that South Americans master English than Russian or Kazakh. On an international level and in the same field, to ensure the safety of passengers in transit, the International Civil Aviation Organization introduced in 2008 language proficiency requirements imposing the use of English among air traffic personnel and pilots.²⁵ This situation shows that for international communication, it is towards English that we turn to maximize the number of people who can understand a message.

As explained above, English has not always held this position of hypercentral language. It has only held this position for the last fifty years, and it is quite possible that the language will lose this title one day (de Swaan, 2001, 6). However, it is necessary to take a step back from Abram de Swaan's research. The latter has indeed been criticized for his theory by Professor Emeritus in the Department of Management, Society and Communication at Copenhagen Business School, Robert Phillipson (Phillipson, 2004). In his article "English in Globalization: Three Approaches," Robert Phillipson makes several criticisms of Abram de Swaan's approach to English in globalization. Phillipson challenges Swaan's view that the spread of English is a natural and inevitable consequence of globalization. Phillipson suggests that the dominance of English is more

²⁴ Langues et religions, *Statistiques cantonales -République et Canton de Genève*, 2020, https://statistique.ge.ch/domaines/apercu.asp?dom=01_06.

²⁵ Williams, Demetrius. "Why English is Considered the Language of the Skies." TOPPAN, TOPPAN Digital Language, 2023, <https://toppandigital.com/us/blog-usa/english-considered-language-skies/>.

the result of deliberate policies and actions that favor English over other languages, and that therefore de Swaan's theory does not consider the linguistic reality.

In her article, "The Value of English in Multilingual Families" (2016), Sarah Chevalier states that in families not all the languages available are spoken to the children. It can happen that some parents decide not to use a language they have whereas others decide to add some. Hence, similarly to this current study, she focused her research on knowing which languages in Switzerland are cut, which languages are added or maintained and why. As one might expect, some families tend to abandon certain languages, but it seems that English is mostly never dropped. More than that, families who decide to add a language, for the most part, almost always decide to equip their child with this same language (Chevalier, 2016, 97). Chevalier's study is based on the specific case of a family with a Swiss mother and a Belgian father. The mother is a native speaker of Swiss German and the whole family lives in German-speaking Switzerland. Concerning the father, he was raised bilingually in Flemish and French. Whereas the parents have three native languages at disposition for their daughter, the family do use three languages, but English has replaced Flemish in the available languages. In families, it happens that some languages are abandoned, above all the ones that according to de Swaan's theory fall in the peripheral or central languages, whereas English seems not to be abandoned and is even added by parents due to its position as a hypercentral language. The answers Chevalier gives regarding the reason for the presence of English is firstly that the parents do not have a common mother tongue, they communicate using their most common language – which is often English. Another reason given is that it is of direct benefit to the child, since it implies that the child will come away with the knowledge of English acquired from hearing the parents (Chevalier, 2016, 98); this instance supports

the idea that English is highly valuable for its communicative properties. Another important element to mention is the abandonment of some of the parents' languages. The case of Flemish being mentioned, when asked to explain why the transmission of Flemish was omitted, the parents simply explain that the language was neither used in Switzerland nor used internationally. Thus, a language that is not classified as native is used and transmitted at the expense of a language that is the mother tongue of one of the speakers. The first conclusion that can be drawn from Chevalier's study is that one of the arguments for language transmission is its communicative usefulness. As for English, but unlike French or German, Flemish is not a national language of Switzerland either. However, due to its numerous communicative advantages, a focus is put on English. Chevalier's work provides a foundation for our study, particularly in the results. Indeed, especially with the mentioned case of the family, it seems obvious that in polyglot families, the choice of languages should be made towards a language having a certain utilitarian status.

Thus, Chevalier concludes her article by proposing that the choice of languages in multilingual Swiss families is perfectly in line with the hierarchical conception of languages proposed by de Swaan (2001). While multilingualism is generally viewed positively by parents, not all languages are equally valued by parents when choosing a language transmission. Perhaps unsurprisingly due to its position as a hypercentral language, English is strongly favored by parents. Moreover, most couples that do not share a common language turn to English – again, most likely because it is the hypercentral language – which allows the child to be exposed to the language. Finally, Chevalier also observed in her study that if one language had to be added to the family's repertoire, it would be English. Thus, both de Swaan's (2001) and Chevalier's (2016) studies confirm that English is a language that attracts because of its hypercentral

position. Nevertheless, I want to qualify the apparent hegemony of English in Switzerland. Our study being based on the linguistic situation in Switzerland, it is therefore important to take the multilingual character of Switzerland, as well as the importance that German plays in the country, into consideration when assessing a certain linguistic precedence. It is possible that in Switzerland, where not all speakers are equally fluent, Genevan parents may decide to give German as much importance as English.

In the Swiss case, François Grin (1999) showed that the mastery of certain languages leads to higher wages. Indeed, according to Grin mastering English or German when living in French-speaking Switzerland has a direct positive impact on the salary.²⁶ Thus, it seems highly likely that, if the languages are not directly transmitted by the parents, the children end up speaking these languages through learning at school or through external means.

All in all, Grin's demonstration confirms the idea that language proficiency, directly influences occupational status; this is a serious argument to be considered when studying the motivations that may lead parents to transmit one idiom at the expense of another. Since Grin has studied the Swiss case, I will also mention here some figures related to German that may also serve as a justification for passing on, or potentially learning German. Hence in Switzerland, a male employee speaking fluently German in Romandy earns around 23% more than a man more experienced but lacking proficiency in the language (Grin, 1999, 149). For English, it is the same finding, the higher the English skills someone has, the more they are paid – someone speaking English fluently would earn 24% more than someone who does not know the language (Grin, 1999, 164). In fact,

²⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Grin's study was carried out at the end of the 90s. Therefore, the economical values of these languages must have changed. Grin's results are available in the appendices 1 and 2.

for a man, both in the French and German-speaking parts of Switzerland, Grin's study shows that there is an average difference of around CHF 2,000 per month between a person with perfect or almost perfect English skills and a person with little or no English skills (Grin, 1999, 139); it is thus not surprising that English be largely taught in schools. Grin concludes his comparison, however, by explaining that in French-speaking Switzerland, English does not seem to be as highly valued as German. Indeed, since the community language of the French-speaking part is not German, it seems more important to master the national majority language rather than English. On the contrary, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, it is knowing English that pays off (Grin, 1999, 169).

For our study, this in-depth study by Grin allows us to show that yes, English is encouraged but also that it is German that seems to pay off the most in the French-speaking canton of Geneva. This exposure could therefore serve as a justification and explanation when analyzing the results concerning the language choices of our Genevan informants.

In addition to the market-related notion, Grin offers three other perspectives on the value of learning a language:

The benefits [of language learning] may be *market related*, such as higher earnings, access to more desirable jobs, etc.; other benefits are of the *non-market* kind, such as direct access, thanks to language competence, to other cultures and people carrying them. [...] whether of the market or of the non-market kind, the benefits and costs of education, [...] may be evaluated at the *private* or *social* level. The private level reflects the conditions confronting the typical or average person, whereas the social level concerns benefits and cost for society as a whole. (Forel, 2016, 65 with Grin, 85–86.)

Therefore, the research of de Swaan, Chevalier and Grin leads to an expected conclusion; in 2022, on a global scale, English is a language that has imposed itself and that consequently now has a strong value. This does not change in Switzerland, where English seems to be a language with a high value due to its position as a hypercentral language. Nevertheless, the case of Switzerland and its multilingualism makes German appear as a high-value language for people who do not have it as their mother tongue. Finally, Sarah Chevalier's study (2016) is fairly like the present one both on the results and its scope. Her findings strongly indicate that English is a language that Swiss households are unwilling to give up, to allow their children to benefit from the conditions that are specific to English. The main difference, however, lies in the geographical area of study. Chevalier is conducting a study covering 35 multilingual families in Switzerland, whereas I am solely focusing on the city of Geneva. It is notwithstanding necessary to qualify Chevalier's study by recalling that her research is based on a small-scale qualitative study.

3. The Current Study

Before diving into the study and the analysis of the results obtained, a clear presentation of the foundations and the implementation of this study is necessary. This section will therefore focus on a presentation of our method of obtaining data, a restatement of our questions and hypothesis, the methodology adopted, and finally a point on how data was elicited.

3.1. Research Design

As this project is part of a Master's thesis project, it is necessary to present the actors of this research. The work is carried out within the linguistics team of the English department of the University of Geneva composed of Gavish Kawol and Alexis Perillo and was supervised by Professor Genoveva Puskas, Drs. Margherita Pallottino and Emily Stanford. If this study initially aims at understanding the language education of Genevan parents, this Master's work will devote itself to the study of the potential value languages can have for Genevan parents when they decide to transmit a language to their children. Because of the importance of these languages both in Geneva and in Switzerland, I will focus on the rate of transmission and spreading of English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese within A) couples that are composed of two native speakers, B) one native speaker, C) at least one parent masters the language without being a native speaker, and finally D) parents who both have no links to the language. In relation to this question, the following three scenarios can be formulated:

H0: Children only master the native language(s) of their parents.

H1: Children only master other language(s) than the native language(s) of their parents.

H2: Children master the native language(s) of their parents and other language(s).

Research by authors such as Sarah Chevalier or Abram de Swaan already allows us to suggest that **H2** should be the most favorable. Indeed, it is probable that English will be highly valued by parents and that a large majority of children will have some knowledge of the language. Concerning German, it should also be favored to a lesser extent, especially since Geneva is a French-speaking city in Switzerland; therefore, German classes are given to children from the age of 8. As for Spanish and Portuguese, these two languages, although they are supercentral languages, should not enjoy more interest locally from non-related parents. Therefore, it would not be surprising if these languages were left out in cases where it is necessary to choose between English and German; on the contrary, it would be more surprising to note their apparition in Genevan families in which no parent has this language as a mother tongue.

3.2. Composition of the Survey

For the elicitation of our data, we chose to circulate an electronic questionnaire through the Qualtrics platform, which allowed us to obtain statistical data using prepared forms. Using questionnaires to obtain information for research has several advantages. The University of York's geography Professor's Valerie Preston (2020) dedicated an article to the ins and outs of conducting research using questionnaires. Questionnaire surveys are a direct way to obtain information about a population; they target a small

group of people who are supposed to be representative of the whole population (Preston, 2020, 176). These questionnaires consist of a list of either open-ended or closed-ended questions. In the case of open-ended questions – as in our survey, the informants’ answers are recorded in their own words. There are many ways to conduct a study using questionnaires, but we chose online “self-administered” questionnaires. The issue of whether a questionnaire is appropriate is also central. Indeed, a questionnaire survey can only be successful when the target population is deemed competent to answer the questions. Large samples are considered to represent the population more reliably; thus, the reliability of the questionnaire improves with the sample size (Preston, 2020, 177). The construction of the questionnaire is also an important consideration. The order of the questions and the length of the questionnaire influence the willingness of respondents to answer the questions. It was important to limit the number of questions asked in the study.

There were several motivations that led us to launch digital self-administered questionnaires. First, the anonymous factor; it was decided that data would be collected using online questionnaires. This option has multiple advantages. First, this form guarantees the anonymity of the parents who complete the questionnaire. If the questions are related to the languages they speak, it is understandable that some parents may feel uncomfortable answering questions that involve their opinion about their perception of multilingualism. A second reason for using online questionnaires is that this method allows us to reach many participants. For the transmission of the questionnaire, flyers and posters in English and French with a QR code were designed.²⁷ Thus, by displaying posters, interested people could scan the document and take part in the questionnaire. This autonomy and the choice to fill in the questionnaire or not allowed us not to be present

²⁷ Appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the documents used to circulate the study.

each time to fill in the questionnaire manually, but instead let the informants fill in the questionnaire at their own pace and by themselves.

In addition, the answers and questions we chose allowed us to control the degree of intimacy of the questions we asked. Since the written form is a fixed form, we were able to ensure that the questions were scrupulously identical between each participant. Finally, in a study on multilingualism in Geneva, the written form allows informants who do not necessarily speak English or French well to take their time when reading the text and the questions. In the same line, this form allows everyone to complete the questionnaire in several times. As the first version of the questionnaire was quite long, this option was very positive for our respondents.

Several types of questions were addressed to the parents who agreed to answer our study. Thus, social background questions opened the research; we were first interested in data such as the age of the participants, their gender, their educational level, but especially their place of residence.²⁸ The main question of this first part concerned the languages known and mastered by the parents; the latter were asked to indicate the languages they mastered in five categories: native, advanced, intermediate, elementary, and finally beginner. It is precisely this last sorting out question that will allow us to know the level of mastery of these languages. The second part of the questionnaire focuses on children. The questions were aimed at understanding in which language parents or relatives communicate with their children. Their answers allow us to understand which languages from their repertoire are transmitted to their children if the heritage language is transmitted or dropped or if external languages appear. There are also questions about

²⁸ The data concerning the place of residence can be important especially if further studies hope to detect potential differences between the districts of Geneva and the various social classes that reside there.

the children's schooling which, for example, could indicate whether the child attends school with a focus on a particular language.

3.3.Methodology

The dissemination of the survey was conducted in two waves. The first was held during the month of June 2022. During this wave, it was mainly a transmission to our direct circles of acquaintances, but also to a lesser extent to certain centers such as certain neighborhood community centers. The first major limitation of this first wave was that it coincided exactly with the exam session of the spring semester 2022. It was therefore impossible for us to circulate our questionnaire assiduously and satisfactorily. During this first wave, the responses of 67 informants were considered satisfactory – the criterion used was that they had answered at least 75% of the questionnaire.²⁹ Answers from speakers of 40 different languages were collected, but unfortunately some non-national languages that are widely spoken in Switzerland, such as Albanian, Serbian or Amharic, could not be referenced. The first wave of the questionnaire also revealed that the study was too long; the second version of the questionnaire was therefore shortened as much as possible not to discourage our informants to finish it.

To fill these gaps, the second wave of the survey was launched in October 2022. The initial questionnaire was refined³⁰, and a broader scan was carried out. Different

²⁹ It is important to note that this criterion stems from a personal choice, and other studies based on this set of data may have chosen another sorting out method.

³⁰ Questions or formulations considered redundant were reworded or shortened to improve the survey completion rate.

lists referencing various activity centers were used to send mails asking for the permission to deposit our questionnaires in these centers.³¹

³¹ The mail template that we send to the courses of language and cultures of origin is available as appendix 7.

4. Presentation of the Results

The results obtained in this study will be presented in three parts. The first part will address the general information concerning mainly the parents of our study. Then, the second part will be devoted to the presentation of information related to the languages of the study whereas the last part gathers information concerning the children.

Thus, the first wave of our study allowed us to gather 67 participants whose results were deemed satisfactory. Of the 67 participants, 36 completed the questionnaire in English and 31 chose French. In the second wave, 12 valid participants were retained: 1 in English and 11 in French. In sum, this study will be based on data from 79 couples.

To statistically present the composition of our couples, an overwhelming majority of our informants have completed a university education when it comes to indicating their level of education. In contrast, a minority indicated that their level of education stops at vocational training or high school level. Indeed, this data indicates two things: with this proportion of graduate parents, our study does not appear as being representative of the Geneva population. Then it also shows that a large proportion of the couples in this study certainly had extensive contact with non-native languages such as English or German during their studies. This information should be taken into account when considering the representativeness of our study. Since these parents have great chances to know the language and its communicative or economic advantages, they could be tempted to pass it on.

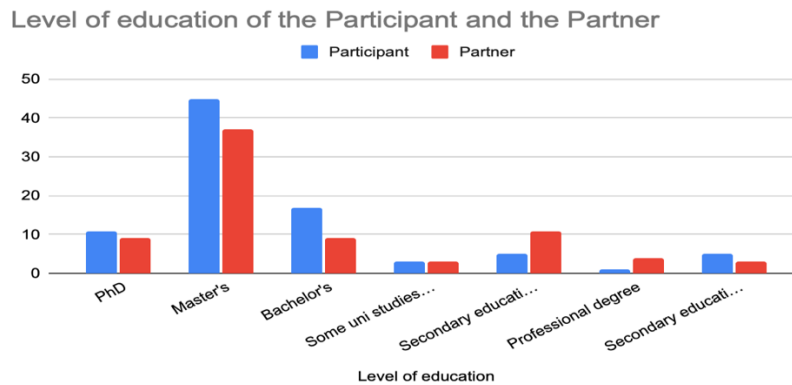


Figure 2. Level of education of the Participant and the Partner.

Also, if we look at the places of residence of our informants, there is a fairly equitable distribution between the so-called “popular” neighborhoods or areas of the canton and the opposite neighborhoods or areas. It must also be taken into consideration for the representativeness of the study:

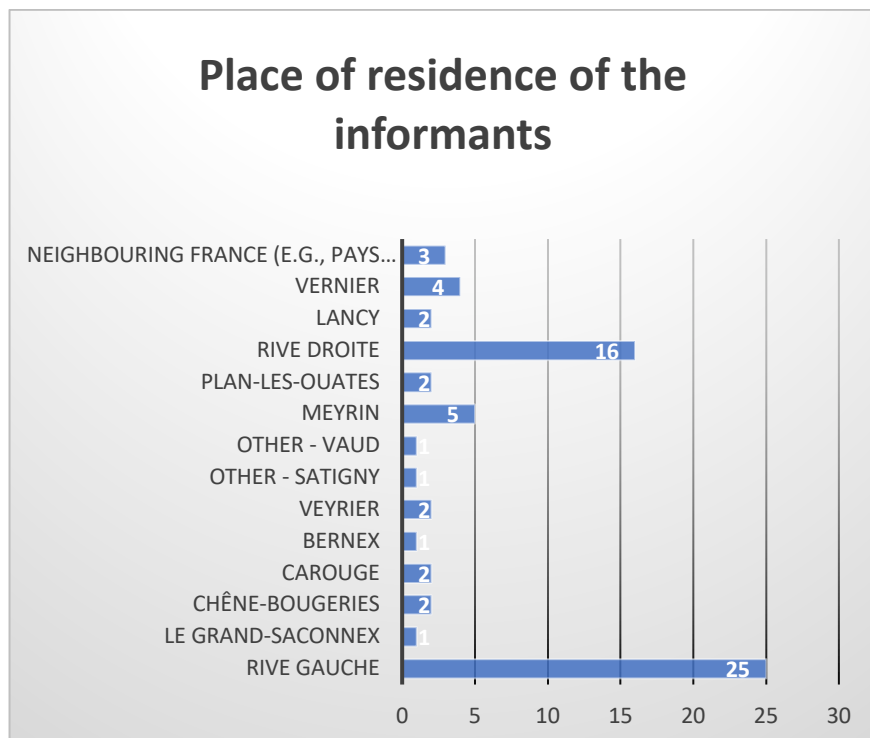


Figure 3. Place of residence of the informants in our study.

Concerning the age span of the participants, a great majority ranges between 35 and 44 years old:

Age range	<25	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64
Number of participants	0	6	45	26	2
Ratio	0%	7,59%	56,96%	32,9%	2,53%

Table 2. Repartition of the age range of the informants in our study.

The gender distribution indicates that more female respondents answered our survey. Therefore, in the following discussion it may be important to bear in mind that in most of the cases, it was the mother who responded.

Gender with which informants identify	Female	Male
Count	57	22
Ratio	72,15%	27,84%

Table 3. Gender repartition of the informants of our study.

Among our 79 informants, 70 indicated living with a partner. When analyzing the results, I decided to classify single parents in category A) both parents are native speakers, in the analysis table (Table 1).³²

³² Since the informant does not live with a partner, the child is only exposed to the language of the parent with whom he or she lives. The degree of exposure of the former to the language of the parent is therefore identical to that of two parents speaking the same language.

The languages collected allow us to represent the linguistic diversity of Geneva. In the first wave, we were able to retrieve data for 40 languages, whereas in the second wave, 5 languages, including Albanian, Serbian, and Amharic, were added, bringing the total number of languages in our study to 45.

Parents were asked to classify their language skills into five levels. With this arrangement, languages may appear more than once depending on whether they are known by one of the parents or their partner. Among the most numerous languages elicited in our study, unsurprisingly, French is known by most parents, as it is mentioned 143 times. English comes next with 135 mentions, then German closes the podium with 64 mentions. Note that in this study, I chose to merge the data of German-Swiss German, Russian-Ukrainian, Italian-Ticino dialect and Portuguese-Brazilian speakers due to the linguistic proximity of these languages.

Figure 4 shows the seven languages that are best known by the informants. Among these seven languages, we can see that Portuguese and Spanish, the other two languages of the study, are also mastered by our informants. The other two languages on this list are Italian, which is a national language, and Russian-Ukrainian.

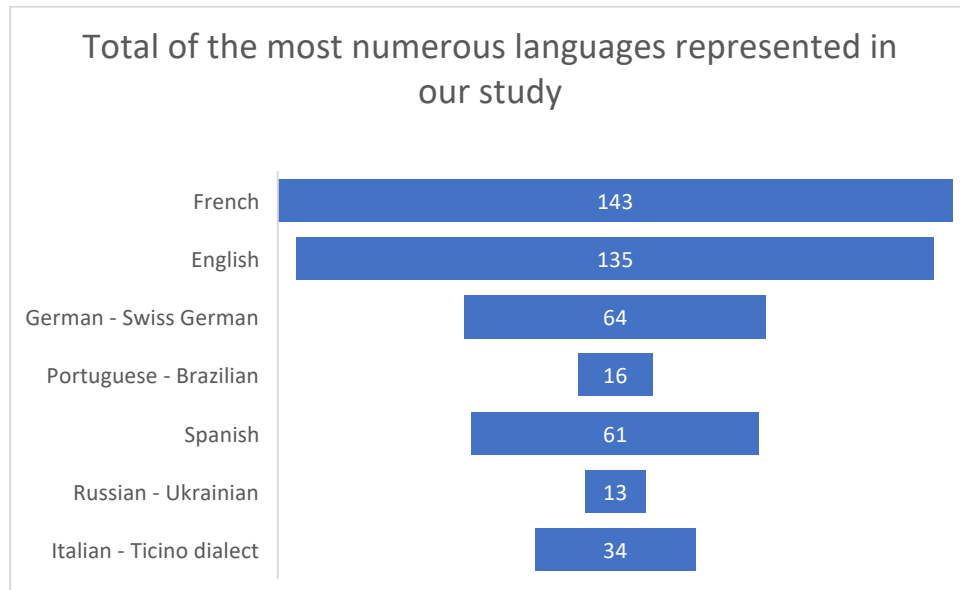


Figure 4. Total of the most numerous languages represented in our study.

While these figures are for the languages most cited in the study, less represented languages are not to be overlooked.

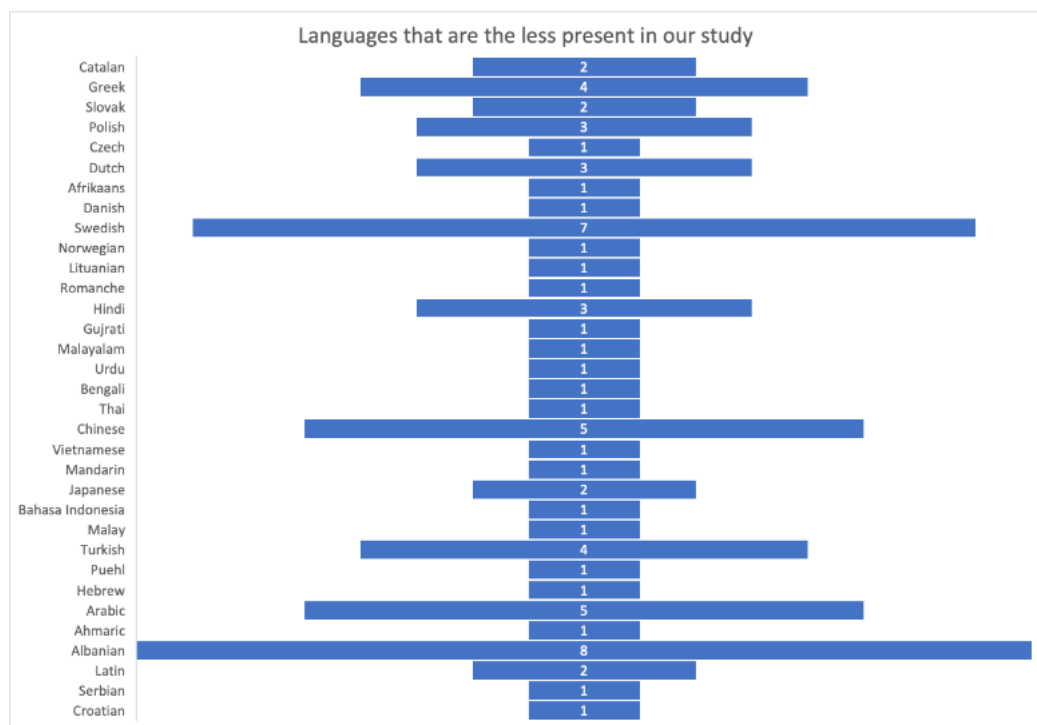


Figure 5. Languages that are the less present in our study.

Among them, Albanian, Arabic, Swedish and Chinese are the most frequently cited languages less present. Our repertoire also includes Hindi, Malay, and Japanese which are also languages that de Swaan (2001) classifies as supercentral.

Before presenting in detail data concerning the four selected languages, and data concerning the children and their language knowledge, the languages our informants use when working will be presented.

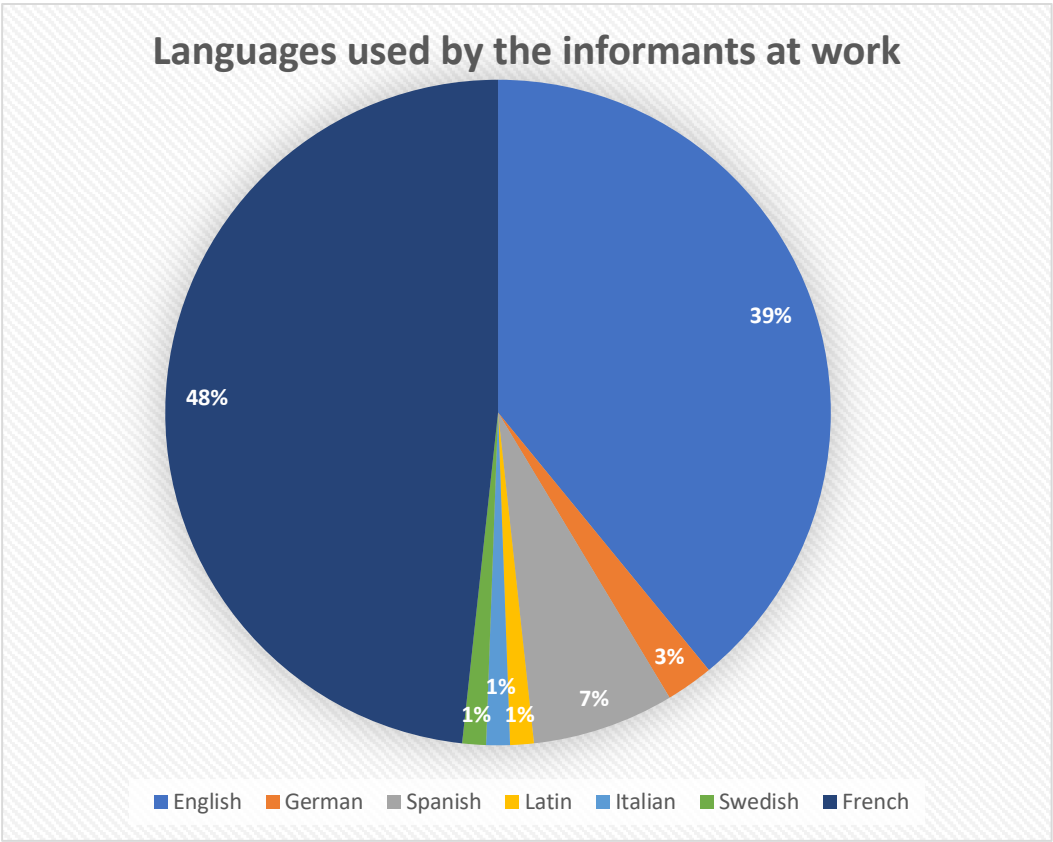


Figure 6. Share of the languages used by parents at work.

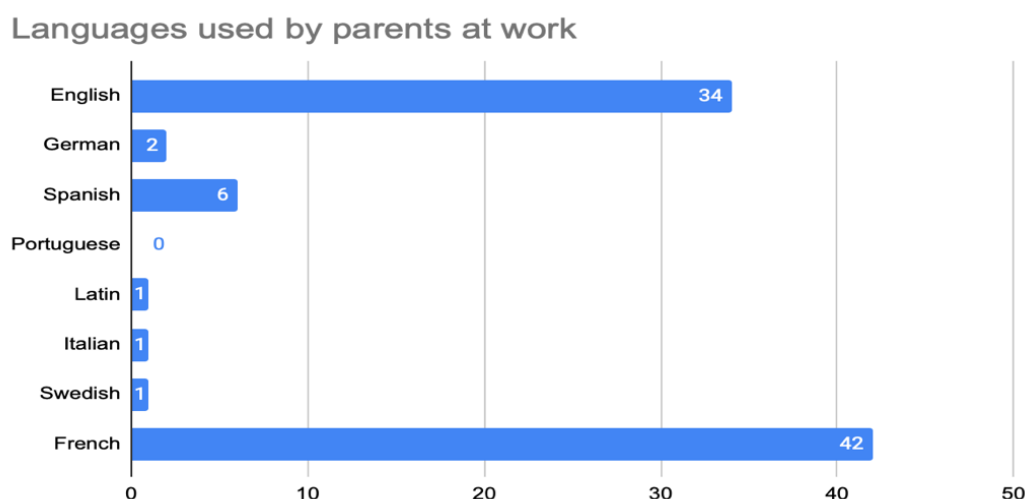


Figure 7. Languages used by parents at work.

French is the language most used by our informants in their workplace (48.3%). However, the gap is not huge with English which is the second most used language by our informants in the workplace (39.1%). German and Spanish are also cited (2.3% and 6.9%) as languages used in the workplace in Geneva. It should be noted, however, that if languages such as Swedish or Latin are mentioned, they are in the extreme minority. Portuguese, which is a language of our study, and particularly present in Geneva, is absent from the languages used by our informants at work.

The central statistic of this work concerns the 4 languages that will be analyzed here. As specified above, this work will attempt to observe the rate of transmission of a language from parents to their child. This division into four groups³³ will allow us to get an overview of the distribution of language proficiency in these languages, but it will also allow us to see if it is possible that a language that is not the mother tongue of the parents appears in the child's language repertoire.

³³ As a reminder, it was decided to divide each language into four groups A) both parents are native speakers, B) only one of the parents is a native speaker, C) at least one of the parents has advanced knowledge of the language and finally D) none of the parents has advanced knowledge of the language.

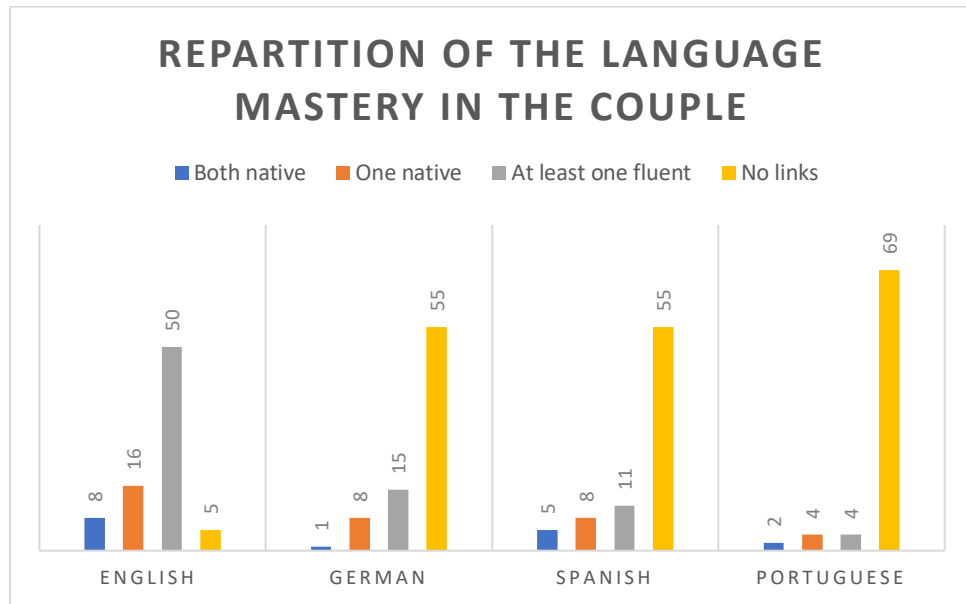


Figure 8. Repartition of the language mastery in the couple.

Figure 8 shows the level of proficiency of our 79 couples for our four languages. Thus, if both parents are native in a language, they will go into category A). When only one of them is native, the couple will go into category B). If one of the two members is proficient in the language, the couple will be placed into category C). Finally, if none of the parents mentioned the language, or if they indicated elementary or beginner proficiency, then they will be placed in D). A first important observation concerns English. This language is the language that is the most known to our informants, since only 5 couples out of 79 indicate having no knowledge of this language; a reason for this would be the pool of parents we have for this study. It is also the language that includes the most couples who have learnt it. Indeed, the first two categories include native parents, while the third category is reserved for parents who have a good level of the language but were not born native. Thus, 50 couples out of 79 are composed of at least one parent who has learnt the language.

Concerning Portuguese, it is important to note that we only have two couples who indicated that they were both native speakers. This is a fact to be considered when discussing the results later. Portuguese is also the language that shows the most couples not having fluency in; indeed, 69 couples out of 79 (87%) classify Portuguese in this category.

The following table (Figure 9) shows the languages for which couples have the least knowledge in. In this category, I decided to incorporate parents who indicated having a level “Advanced” and “Intermediate” in the language. This choice stands because they do not have a native mastery of the language, so they have at least another language which they are more comfortable with. Also, having this level in the language suggests that they would be able to speak fluently in the language, and could even teach the language themselves to their children. On the contrary, parents who indicated having an “Elementary” or “Beginner” level in the languages were not considered in this category, because it is less probable that they would communicate in this language with their children since they are not totally at ease. As previously specified, English is the language most mastered at a non-native level by our parents. It is followed by German, Spanish and Portuguese. The fact that Spanish and Portuguese are the most unfamiliar languages to our couples in this study may already expose a limitation of our work. Indeed, Portuguese and Spanish are two languages that are very present in the canton; the fact that we have only a few people who master these languages indicates that we failed in targeting a representative part of the Geneva population.

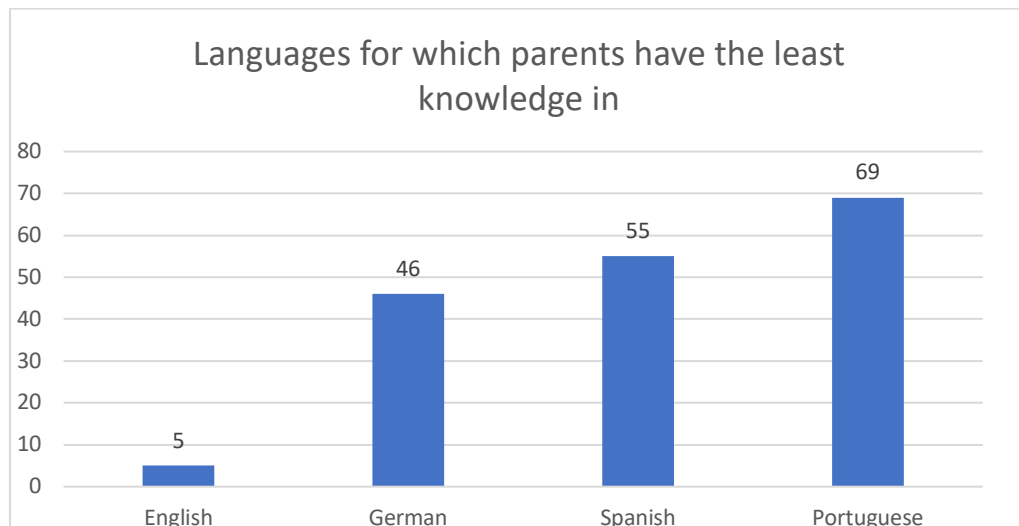


Figure 9. Languages for which parents have the least knowledge (Elementary, Beginner or no relation to the language).

Regarding the children, the first data to be presented concerns the fact that they are bilingual. Thus, to the question, “Is your child bilingual?” 83% of the parents answered yes.

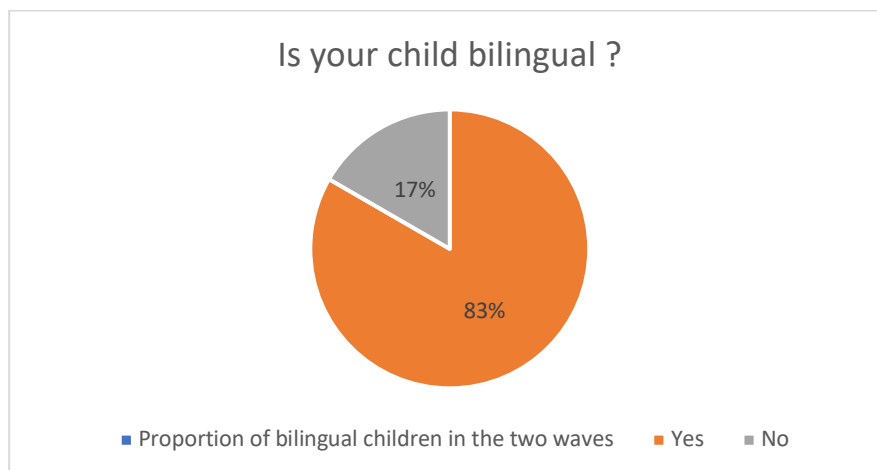


Figure 10. The share of bilingual children in the study.

The next statistical information concerns the child’s future language. In the second wave, a question was asked about the language that parents would like their child to master.

Four languages were mentioned by the parents: English, German, Spanish and Portuguese. In order, most parents want their child to be able to speak English (6 responses), followed by German (4 responses), and Spanish and Portuguese (1 response each).

A first statistical description regarding the children of our couples concerns the languages spoken by them. Most of our couples indicate that their children master French; this answer is not surprising since it is the official language of the canton and public education is done in this language. English, Spanish, Italian, German, and Albanian are the languages that follow French among the most spoken by the children of our couples. Again, English and German are languages whose teaching starts at a young age in the canton,³⁴ whereas the learning of Spanish and Italian is possible but only on a secondary-school level.

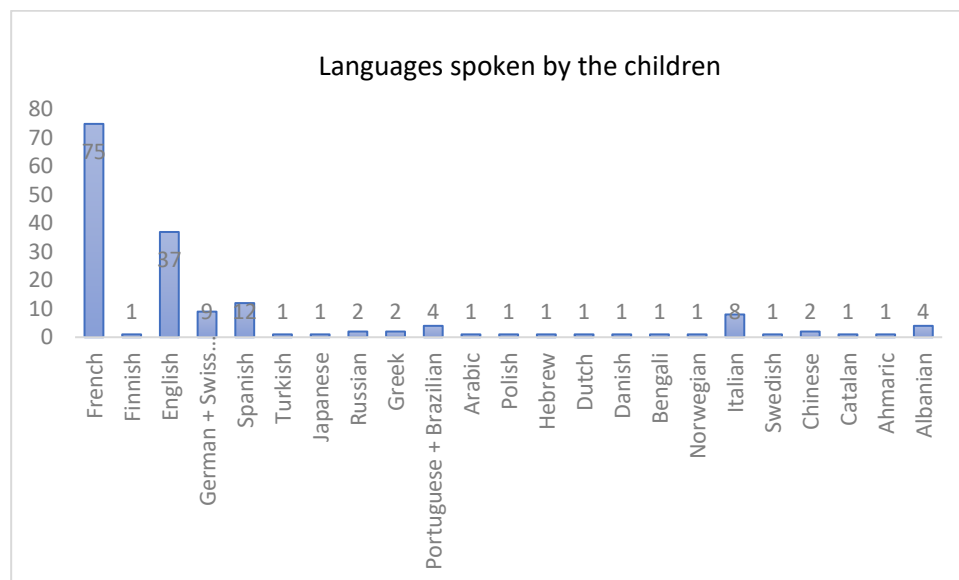


Figure 11. Languages spoken by the children of our study.

³⁴ C.f. part 1.2. with the legislative texts concerning the language education in Geneva.

A statistic concerning the language in which children receive their education allows us to underline that French, in great majority, then English and German are the languages in which children receive their education.

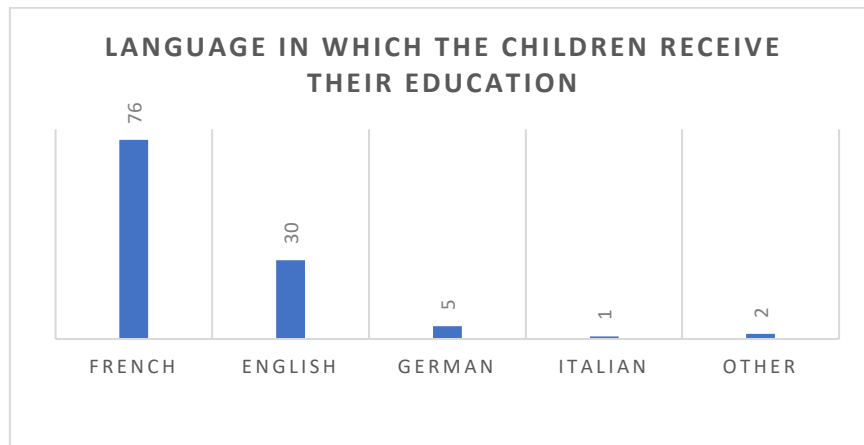


Figure 12. Language in which the children receive their education.

The next chart presented (Table 4) concentrates the transmission rate of each language depending on its presence in the couple. Under each category, a fraction and a percentage are presented. The numerator stands for the number of children who end up speaking the language, whereas the denominator represents the total number of children that fit in the category. The first case is 1A and stands for a situation in which both parents in the couple are native speakers of English. Out of these eight couples, 100% of them do have a child that speaks English – eight children out of the eight couples composed of two native speakers of English speak English. The different sections will be discussed in detail in the next part and attempts to explain the current results will be provided.

	1. English	2. German	3. Spanish	4. Portuguese
A) Both native	8/8–100%	1/1–100%	5/5–100%	2/2–100%
B) One native	14/16–87,5%	8/8–100%	6/8–75%	4/4–100%
C) At least one of the parents masters the language	15/50–30%	0/15–0%	1/11–9.09%	0/4–0%
D) None speaks the language	0/5–0%	1/55–1,82%	1/55–1,82%	0/69–0%

Table 4. Table with the transmission rate of the language. This table displays the percentage of children speaking the language depending on the relation their parents have towards the language.

5. Discussion of the Results

For the study of table 4, a discussion by category 1A-2A-3A-4A, etc., will be made. I draw attention to the fact that the first two categories of this work: A and B should not give clear indications of the value of the language. Indeed, since the languages appear as heritage languages in these two categories, justifications for transmitting the language to enable children to communicate with its relatives should prevail.

1-2-3-4 A: English, German, Spanish and Portuguese when parents are both native speakers

All the cases where both parents are native speakers of the language are similar and can be explained by the same reasons; the child is exposed to a heritage language that is shared by both parents. The fact that both parents share the same language can suggest that this language will certainly be spoken at home by the parents between them. It seems probable then that if the parents speak a single and same language, they will teach it to their children to render them able to communicate with them and the relatives.

The case of English will serve as an illustration for the short discussion of this point; the same reasoning is valid for the three other languages. In the case where both parents are native speakers of English, the transmission rate of the language is 100%; this result is the same for the three other languages. Among our eight couples who indicated both mastering English as a mother tongue: (19), (32), (40), (41) and (95)³⁵ all feature a

³⁵ From now on and until the end of the study, numbers in brackets will be used in the text to identify the couples. These numbers were assigned according to the order in which the couples responded.

situation in which no other language is the native one of the parents, there is then no situation of competition between the languages.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Language spoken by the child
19	English	/	English / French
32	English	/	English / French
40	English	English	English / French
41	English	English	English / French
42	English	English / Spanish ³⁶	English / French
43	Norwegian / Swedish / English	/	English / French / Norwegian
58	German / Spanish / Swedish / English	English	French / English / Spanish / German
95	English	English	English / French

Table 5. Linguistic composition of couples (19) - (32) - (40) - (41) - (42) - (43) - (58) and (95).

For (42), (43) and (58), the situation is different since the informants master another language along English. For (42), the partner masters Spanish but it turns out that the language is dropped since the child does not master it. In this couple, we could conclude that English prevails over Spanish. A reason that could be given for this choice would be

³⁶ The languages in bold indicate which languages spoken by the parents was not transmitted to the children.

that since the child can master the hypercentral language: English, there would be no reasons for him to master Spanish, even if the language would be communicatively interesting. A second explanation would be that this language is the one in which both parents converse at home. For the sake of facilitating communication in the family, having the same primary language of the parents that is passed on to the child seems to be attractive for family life. In the case where the informant specified that the heritage language of the child is often used with the relatives, we could conclude in this case that since the language that the child ends up speaking is English, the latter would only need this language to communicate actively with his relative. This hypothesis tends to be corroborated by the answers of (48) and (58). In these couples, we do have more information concerning the heritage languages used by the relatives. In both cases, the language that is dropped is the language that is not used to communicate with the relatives, hence, the presentation of this case serves to affirm that when a language is transmitted as a heritage language, it is essentially for reasons of communication with relatives that come into play.

German, Spanish and Portuguese, when both parents are native in the language, all obey to the same logic. The native language of both parents ends up being transmitted to the child. Therefore, in this first category, the main argument for passing down the language is primarily because it is a heritage language and that it would facilitate communication both with the parents but also with the rest of the family.

The second category (B) will focus on the situation when only one parent is native in the language. This scenario will highlight the situation when both parents do not necessarily have the same initial language of communication and can then offer greater insights on the potential value of a language. Indeed, if a language is passed on to the detriment of another, we could deduct that specific reasons prevail, other than for the communication with the family.

1B: English when one parent is a native speaker

Of the 16 couples who indicated that at least one parent was a native English speaker, 14 have a child to whom the language was transmitted.

The cases of couples (66) and (104) are identical. These are the two couples in which the transmission of English did not take place. The following table presents the situation of the couples:

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Language spoken by the child
66	French	English / Malay	French
104	French / Spanish / Portuguese	Spanish / English	French / Spanish / Portuguese

Table 6. Linguistic composition of (66) and (104).

An interesting observation is that in both cases, English as the language of the partner disappears. There are several explanations for this absence. In the case of (66), the partner

is indicated as mastering French at an “advanced” level. The language of communication of the couple could therefore be this language, which explains why it is the only language mastered by the child. The same observation can be made for couple (104) since the child masters Spanish and Portuguese. However, it should be noted that the child speaks Portuguese, which is specific to one of the parents, but does not have English, although it is also specific to one of the parents. During the questionnaire, our informant indicated often using Portuguese to speak with their child while the partner speaks Spanish with the child. Thus, in this case, it is the partner who wishes to transmit Spanish rather than English to the child. Both indicated that their child used the language of inheritance “very often” with the grandparents – in their case Portuguese and Spanish. Thus, in this context, the choice of language also appears to be motivated by an ability to communicate with relatives. Moreover, the language in which the child communicates with the relatives is indicated to be Portuguese. We could deduce that maybe the part of the family that speaks English is not present in the life of the child, which would explain the absence of this heritage language. Another explanation could be that the partner indicated speaking English at a native level, but it turns out to be erroneous. Another element supporting this hypothesis is that the couple indicated that they would love their child to master English, the fact that one parent is a native speaker but has not transmitted the language to the child might be justified by the incapacity of the parent to do so. All in all, it also seems that in this case, the main motivation for passing down a language is the communicative competence. The results of our survey indicate that English was passed down in 87,5% of the cases when one parent was a native speaker, but the results can be explained by an eventual error from the informant or because the language does not turn out to be useful for intra-familial communication.

2B: German when one parent is a native speaker

For category 2B, we managed to get German-speaking participants. It turns out that out of our 8 couples, 100% of them passed on the language to their child. If we look at the parents' comments, the element that always comes up when the information is available – this is the case for couples (12), (59) and (101), is that the child uses German to communicate with family members. Thus, as with English before, one of the reasons that seems to explain the passing on of the language is that it allows communication with the family. The case of couple (101) might give us an additional justification. The couple being from the second wave, they were able to answer whether they wanted their child to master a language. The couple answered that no, there was no other language they would like their child to master. Whereas most parents responded that they would like their child to speak German or English – certainly due to the professional attractiveness of the language as explained by Grin (1999), these parents did not indicate anything. This could be interpreted as their child already being sufficiently equipped to live in Switzerland by knowing German. This interpretation is only an assumption but would corroborate Grin's conclusions that German is a professionally valuable language in French-speaking Switzerland. In any case, unlike English, German reaches the rate of transmission of 100% when one parent is native in the language.

3B: Spanish when one parent is a native speaker

In the case of Spanish, only 2 out of 8 couples did not pass on the language to their child; these are couples (42) and (101) in which Spanish does not appear in the child's repertoire.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Language spoken by the child
42	English	English / Spanish	French / English
101	Spanish	German	French / German

Table 7. Linguistic composition of couples (42) and (101).

Looking at the languages the children end up speaking, we notice that two other languages of our study: English and German, prevail over Spanish. The case of (42) has already been discussed in section 1-2-3-4A. As a reminder, potential conclusions were that the parents felt that it was not necessary to teach the child English since the later already spoke English.³⁷ The other potential conclusion was that the child would not use Spanish with the relatives, so there would then be no need to transfer the language to the child.

It is again difficult to try to come up with a definitive answer as for why Spanish was not passed down to the child. An analysis of the answers provided render the results difficult to grasp. The informant indicated that the child actively used French and German as main languages. However, at the question, “How often do you use the following

³⁷ This hypothesis would lead to the conclusion that some parents consider more attractive or valuable to master English over Spanish in Geneva, but with our current set of data nothing allows us to have concrete evidence of this.

languages with your child? - Heritage language - a family language other than French”³⁸, the informant exposed that Spanish was used “very often” with the child. In this case, two scenarios are possible: 1) the child does speak Spanish, but the parents forgot to mention it or did not complete well the form, 2) or the parents speak “very often” Spanish to the child, but the latter does not speak it and just has a passive understanding of the language. This hypothesis would be the most convincing since the informant also indicated that the child was “never” using Spanish when answering the question: “How often are the following languages used by your child?”³⁹; the same answer was provided when asked if the child used Spanish with the relatives: “How often does your child use the following languages with his/her grandparents, cousins, etc.?”⁴⁰ Therefore, in the specific case of Spanish when one parent is a native speaker, we cannot conclude any form of prevalence of the language over others. The sole and main reason – as for the previous cases so far – as for why Spanish was passed down is more related to communicative reasons but within the family circle and with relatives – it will then correspond to the use of the heritage language. Even if we could also interpret that they do not consider Spanish to be important enough to be passed down to their child despite the lack of communicative reasons, it is really the communication reasons that are supported by convincing evidence here.

³⁸ Translation mine from a question in our survey: A quelle fréquence employez-vous les langues suivantes avec votre enfant ? - Langue d’héritage (une langue familiale autre que le français) -Texte.

³⁹ Translation mine from a question in our survey: A quelle fréquence les langues suivantes sont-elles employées par votre enfant ? -Autre.

⁴⁰ Translation mine from a question in our survey: A quelle fréquence votre enfant emploie-t-il/elle les langues suivantes avec ses grand-parents, cousins,etc ? - Autre -Texte.

4B: Portuguese when one parent is a native speaker

In the case of Portuguese, 100% of our couples in which at least one of the parents is a native speaker have transmitted this language to their child. Once again, it is the justification of communication with the family that is put forward by the parents.

Number of the couples	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Language spoken by the child
39	English	Portuguese	English / Portuguese / French
79	Brazilian	French	Brazilian / French
100	French	Portuguese	French / Portuguese
104	French / Spanish / Portuguese	Spanish / English	French / Spanish / Portuguese

Table 8. Linguistic composition of couples (39) - (79) - (100) and (104).

The same scenario applies to these four couples. Portuguese being the native and heritage language of one of the parents, the language is transmitted to the child to allow communication with the relatives. Let us note that couple (100) does not provide precise information concerning the languages used with the relatives. Portuguese is hence not specifically presented as the language used with the family, but it seems more than probable that mastering the language allows the children to discuss with the relatives. Another reason that we may tend to cite is that this is the first language of one parent. It would then be easier for the parents to express themselves in the language, to pass down

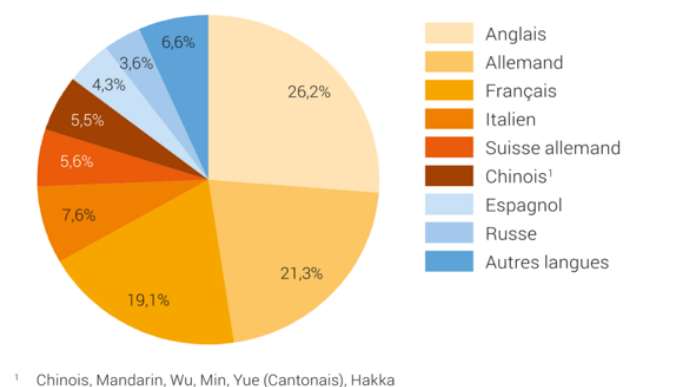
the language to the child would also be a mean for the parents to ensure fluid communications with the children.

To sum up, the first two categories A) and B), situations in which both parents or at least one of the parents was native showed high transmission rates. The main argument is that language is a tool for communication with relatives, but also to establish a common mother tongue with the parents. Therefore, the main reason for transmitting a language is its value as a heritage language. This situation will certainly be quite different from the next two categories on, since in these cases the language will not appear as a heritage language, the communicative factor with the relatives should therefore not, or only to a small extent, be present.

The next point of discussion will concern the situation C) in which at least one parent masters the language. The analysis of this category is also important because it allows us to see which languages have been learnt by the parents despite an initial lack of connection with the language. Nevertheless, if we focus on the transmission of the language from the parents to the child, we can conclude that if the language is transmitted despite the absence of family ties, there may be a particular interest on the parents' part to want to transmit a language that is not a heritage language to their children.

Since this category will discuss languages that are not spoken by children because of heritage reasons, a general comparison can be made with a national survey asking respondents which language they would like to master for professional reasons. Even if these results concerned adults, it says a lot about the attractiveness and the usefulness of the language for professional reasons. In this chart, most respondents indicated that they would like to master English, followed by German. Spanish also appears in this ranking whereas Portuguese does not. We may then expect that these exact same languages end up being sought-after by the parents for their children.

Langues que les personnes actives occupées souhaitent apprendre pour des raisons professionnelles



Source: OFS – Enquête sur la langue, religion et culture (ELRC, 2019)

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Figure 13. Languages that working-age adults would like to learn for professional reasons in Switzerland.⁴¹

1C: English when at least one of the parents masters the language

Among our 4 languages, the transmission of English is the strongest. In fact, 50 couples have at least one parent who has a good knowledge of English – Advanced or Intermediate level. 30% of the children of a couple in category C are presented as speaking English – 15 children out of 50, this is the highest result since two other languages do not take off whereas Spanish is the other language transmitted when a parent masters the language (9,09%).

There are several reasons as for why English is the non-native language most passed on by parents to their children. First English is the language the best known among parents themselves, it means that they chose, or their parents chose for them, to learn the language; it already indicates that there is a certain interest from these parents towards this language. Also, I presented that most of our parents had a university level of education, implying that they have certainly had extensive contact with non-native

⁴¹ Langues et religions, Office fédéral de la statistique, 2020, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/effectif-evolution.html>.

languages during their studies, and that they may also certainly use these at work nowadays. Since these parents are themselves in a situation where they see a potential benefit or opportunity in mastering English, it is not surprising that they also want to pass a language that they may have experienced as useful for their studies or their work. Hence, our results may have been different with a broader pool of participants.

Indeed, as Grin's work has presented (1999), English is a language that carries over economically. There is a real impact on the income that a person could claim if English is mastered; hence, mastering English is almost a guarantee for the child to have a better salary expectation. In the second wave, the question, "Is there a language that you would like your child to master?"⁴² Only 9 informants answered, and among these, 7 (77,7%) indicated that they would like their children to master English. This information proves that English is recognized by parents as a language that should be mastered. Another reason is that English is a language that allows for a wide range of communication. Thus, financial, and communicative factors are reasons as for why parents might want to pass on English to their child despite the presence of more personal ties.

There are 15 children that master English even though it is not the heritage native language of their parents. Among these 15, 10 children⁴³ (66,6%) attend a private school and receive a bilingual education. Their learning of English comes then from their parents choosing a curriculum which stresses the learning of English. This choice may be related to the fact that these parents are not native and themselves mastered the language by learning it.

⁴² Translation of mine : Y a-t-il une/des langues que vous aimeriez que votre enfant connaisse ? Si oui, merci d'indiquer la/les langue(s) que vous aimeriez que votre enfant connaisse. - Selected Choice.

⁴³ These children are children of couples: (1), (4), (6), (30), (34), (53), (65), (88), (89) and (94).

For the 5 other children, it is impossible to know for sure for what specific reason they master English despite having no heritage link with it. Parents justify that their child is bilingual because they have at least one other heritage language, but no information related to English is given. There are several possibilities as for why they master the language. A probable possibility would be that the parents decided to transmit them the language. Informant (81) is a great indicator for this instance:

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level	Language spoken by the child
81	Polish	English / French	English

Table 9. Linguistic composition of couple (81).

For (81), no partner is indicated, the informant should educate the child on its own. If we look at the languages spoken by the child, we notice that it is not the mother tongue of the parent that was passed on but rather the language mastered at an advanced level: English. It is impossible to have concrete and sure reasons as for why informant (81) decided to drop Polish and decided to speak English with the child. Notwithstanding, there are great odds that this informant clearly decided to transmit a language that is considered as “valuable” in terms of economic, and communicative opportunities. Where Polish is considered as a central language by de Swaan – i.e., a language that would not be specifically used outside Poland – the informant may have decided to endow the child with English, the hypercentral language.

The same reasoning, but without strong evidence can be carried out with couples (8), (36), (65), (72), (99). All these couples are composed of at least one member that masters English. All their children also master the language in addition to the native languages of the parents. The case of (36) exposes a case in which the parents do not have the same native language but do share another language. Since the child ends up speaking English, we can conclude that the child does speak the language because it should have become the language spoken at home between the parents.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level	Native language of the partner	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level by the partner	Language spoken by the child
8	Russian	English	Russian	English	Russian / French / English
36	Hindi	English	Bengali	English	Bengali / French / English
72	French	English	French	English	French / English

99	Albanian	French / English	Albanian	English	Albanian / French / English
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Table 10. Linguistic composition of couples (8) - (36) - (65) - (72) and (99).

Apart from this case, it is impossible to prove that parents left out their language for English, even if it is also clearly possible that one of them chose to speak English while the other spoke the native language. A reason then as for why the children speak the language would be that they just follow English classes at school or that they do follow out-of-school lessons in English. This scenario could be the case for couples (36), (65), (72), and (99) since the children are not old enough to get English lessons in the Genevan public school system. For couple (8), the child is old enough to receive its first English lessons so that could be the reason. In any case, the fact that English is a language taught at school from an early age, and that is also greatly present on different platforms – TV, advertisements, or social media – contributes to the familiarity of the child with the language.

On the other hand, several reasons could be given as for why English was not passed on by parents even though they learnt it. A first reason could be the other languages that the child already speaks. In the case of couple (5)⁴⁴, their child already speaks Spanish, which is a supercentral language with a good communicative range. In this case, it is possible that the parents did not want to pass on English to their child since the child already has a language like Spanish. Nevertheless, this result must be strongly qualified

⁴⁴ C.f. table below.

since it would contradict the hypothesis presented under category 3B with the case of (42).

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level	Native language of the partner	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level by the partner	Language spoken by the child
5	Spanish	English	French	English / Spanish	French / Spanish

Table 11. Linguistic composition of couple (5).

Another reason has to do with the level the parents really have in this language. In category C, the informants indicated having an advanced or intermediate level in the language. It may be that parents feel that even though they have this level in the language, they do not feel legitimate to pass on the language, even if the level can be considered as good, because it does not offer them enough linguistic flow or fluency. More than the legitimacy the parent has with the language, it is not because they master the language that they would necessarily want to communicate in this language with their children. Hence, parents think that the language can be learnt more easily later than most of the heritage languages. In fact, during a child's schooling in Geneva, only Spanish, Italian, English, German, and French will be offered to the child for learning; this does not leave

much space for the acquisition of heritage languages in the Genevan public school system. The two aforementioned scenario could be supported by couples (97), (100), (106) and (108) for whom we have the information that they would love their child to speak English; even though these parents do master English but did not pass it down to their child.

It is also possible that some parents learnt English for other reasons than professional or communicative motivations – they may have lived in English-speaking countries, or they may have indicated that they have a good level in the language just having followed English classes at school. The latter do not necessarily know about notions such as the “critical period”, which would imply that it is better for the parents to teach or transmit a language to their young child than to wait.

Therefore, among parents that already master English, some of them really want to stress and consolidate the learning of the language through schooling in the language; 60% of the children whose parents master English attend a private school in which the apprenticeship of English is stressed. Other parents, as with (81), really think that it is worthier to transmit English rather than their native central language. Finally, other reasons for the children mastering the language would be that the parents decide to speak English at the expense of another language, or that the child simply learnt English through classes at or out-of-school. All in all, this section permitted to demonstrate that English was a real sought-after language, and is the most spoken non-heritage language.

2-3-4C: German, Spanish and Portuguese when at least one of the parents masters the language

The cases of German, Spanish, and Portuguese when at least one parent is proficient in the language are similar.

Number of the couple	German	Spanish	Portuguese
At least one of the parents masters the language	0/15–0%	1/11-9.09%	0/4–0%

Table 12. Value of transmission of German, Spanish and Portuguese when “At least one of the parents masters the language”.

Very few parents who reported proficiency in the language passed the idiom to their child. 9.09% of couples passed down Spanish to their child, whereas German and Portuguese was passed down to 0% of these couple’s children. A first observation would be the huge discrepancy between the number of couples having at least one parent mastering English compared to the number of couples having at least one parent mastering German, Spanish or Portuguese. There are around three times more couples having noticeable knowledge of English than German, around four times more mastering English than Spanish and around twelve times more mastering English than Portuguese.

What might explain why no couple with a good command of German decided to pass on the language is again the lack of fluency. It would be complicated for a parent to pass on a language that they know if they are not particularly fluent in it; many parents must have a fair level of German but would consider it bold or wrong to transmit this

language to their child. Also, because of their presence in Switzerland, these parents could consider that the child will learn this language by themselves at school, since its learning is mandatory in Geneva. However, we will note that none of these couples enrolled their child to a private school teaching German. It seems that parents must prefer that their child knows English rather than German, or also because fewer private schools in Geneva propose a German bilingual education. Therefore, when compared to the percentage of children in 1C, it indicates that parents seem to favor the teaching of English to German for their children.

Concerning Portuguese, a first comment concerns the fact that solely four parents that are not native speakers of Portuguese have a certain knowledge in the language. This is the language that features the fewer non-native speakers knowing it. None of their children speaks the language, nor are enrolled in a school where the education is given in Portuguese.⁴⁵ There are different elements that justify an absence of interest from the parents to transmit the language. First of all, there would be other languages that would be considered as more useful in Geneva than Portuguese. English has already been presented as the hypercentral language, but also a language that can connect all the linguistic parts of the country. German would also be a language that would have more reasons to be favored by parents for their children, since it is a central language in Switzerland. It also turns out that at the world scale, English or Spanish would also be favored compared to Portuguese for a large-scale communication. All in all, it seems that Portuguese, even if it is a supercentral language, does not have enough reasons to be learnt in Switzerland to be favored by parents.

⁴⁵ This type of school where a bilingual education in Portuguese is provided does not even exist in Geneva.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level	Native language of the partner	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level by the partner	Language spoken by the child
86	French / English	Portuguese / Spanish / German	French	English / German	English / French / Spanish

Table 13. Linguistic composition of (86).

For Spanish, only the couple in which one of the parents indicated having a good command of Spanish (86) passed on the language to their child. In this couple, only the informant indicates having an “intermediate” command in the language. This is also one of our only two couples who reported having a nanny taking care of their child. The informant, however, indicated never using Spanish with the child, while the nanny “rarely” uses Spanish with the child. It should be noted, however, that the child of this couple also speaks English, which is a highly sought-after language, but also the mother tongue of the informant. However, both Portuguese and German were indicated as being mastered by the informant – German is even indicated as such by both parents – but neither language was targeted by the parents. The more frequent exposure to German in Switzerland may be a justification as for why the language was not targeted directly by

the parents, while the low communicative or economic significance of Portuguese in the country could explain why this language was not targeted by this couple for their child. This case indicates us that Spanish seems to be more valuable than Portuguese in Geneva, since these parents decided to favor it at the cost of Portuguese. Concerning the fact that German was also put aside, these parents may consider that the Genevan school system could provide some basis of German whereas it would be more difficult for a child to acquire Spanish in Geneva public school.

1-2-3-4D: English, German, Spanish and Portuguese when none of the parents speaks the language

This final category encapsulates data of parents that indicated having an elementary or beginner level in the language. Also, parents that have no links with the language will be classified in this section.

Only couples with no relationship to English or Portuguese have children who do not speak the language. Only 5 couples have no real command of English – this is the lowest total among our 4 languages. Portuguese, on the other hand, is the other extreme with 69 couples in which no parent has a relationship with the language.

Since English is a language necessarily taught at school, one justification for the fact that no child speaks the language would be that the child has not yet reached a school level where English starts to be introduced. In Geneva's elementary school, English begins to be introduced at the 7P level, with children aged 10–11 years.⁴⁶ We could then assume that the children have not yet reached the grade in which English is introduced, but among our 5 pairs, the children of (77) and (98) have reached this level but are not indicated as mastering the language. Some parents decided to consider their children as mastering the language because the child learns the language at school.⁴⁷ In this case, it seems that the parents do not consider their child as speaking English through the lessons provided by Geneva primary school. Notwithstanding, it seems more than probable that the children will have at some point some command of the language due to the school system.

⁴⁶ This age corresponds to the upper limit of the children our study targeted.

⁴⁷ (32), for instance, indicated that their child was instructed with German at school even if they do not consider that the child speaks German.

The case of Portuguese seems to be quite regular. Since the beginning of the study, only parents who have mastered the language as a heritage language have children who end up speaking Portuguese. This clearly indicates that Portuguese is not a language that attracts parents to educate their children to in Geneva.

Concerning German, there is only one couple in which the child speaks the language while the parents have no link with it. It is impossible to deduce a reason that could explain why the child of couple (1) does speak German. Some attempts at an explanation could be that the child learnt the language at school. However, the child attends a private school in which the main languages are English and French. It is notwithstanding probable that this school teaches German to its students, that would explain that the child is indicated as speaking the language. Another reason would be that the student receives an external education in German. Again, a justification for the child mastering German is its recognition as an important language in Switzerland.

Our last case concerns a child that speaks Spanish despite having parents not mastering the language.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level	Native language of the partner	Languages mastered at an Advanced or Intermediate level by the partner	Language spoken by the child
83	French	German / Russian / German	Russian	French	French / Spanish

Table 14. Linguistic composition of (83).

The results of this case must be scrupulously qualified; hence the parents expose that their child is bilingual because at some points in the survey, the parents mentioned that they speak Spanish as a heritage language to their child. However, Spanish does not appear as a heritage language for none of the parents. It is possible that parents mixed up some questions in our survey that would distort the results of this point. Nonetheless, they also indicate that they employ a nanny who speaks Spanish with the child. The parents indicate at the beginning of the survey that their child is bilingual due to practicing with the nanny the parents employ. As for multiple cases, the fact that the child speaks Spanish can be explained because it is a supercentral language, at least according to de Swaan. The situation of the family requires that they resort to employ a nanny, in this case they must have chosen to employ someone that can teach another language to the child. Concerning German, it is possible that the parents do not use these languages at home,

and resort to a language that they share such as French to communicate between them. They could also consider that the child would acquire German at school. All in all, it seems that in this last category no special trend emerges concerning the learning of a language for which none of the parents has a relationship.

5.1. Extra Observations

If this study was meant to observe the value of languages through their appearance or not in the language repertoire of the child, some other observations regarding other languages stand out.

Some native languages of the parents are sometimes omitted, and therefore not passed down to the child. Couples (25) and (81) offer great instance of a mother tongue dropped by the parents in favor of another language.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Language spoken by the child
37	Lithuanian	English	French / English
81	Polish	/	English

Table 15. Linguistic composition of couples (37) and (81).

In the case of (37), Lithuanian, which is the native language of the informant, was dropped, and hence not transmitted to the child. The native language of the partner was favored in this situation. To the question: “Which words or phrases come to mind when you think about children being exposed to multiple languages from birth or early childhood?” the informant stresses the fact that mastering languages can offer “more

opportunities” and be “important”. We can deduce from this answer that the main motivation behind learning a language concerns the benefits of knowing it. Therefore, it confirms the assumption that the parent decided to drop Lithuanian that is a central language, in favor of English. The case of (81) was already discussed before but permits to confirm that some languages tend to disappear in favor of others. In this case, the mother chose to move aside Polish at the benefit of English.

Some languages that are not English, German or Spanish are also added by parents in the repertoire of the children. Chinese and Arabic are spoken by the child despite having parents native in other languages.

Number of the couple	Native language of the informant	Native language of the partner	Languages spoken by the child
18	Swiss German / German	/	Swiss German / French / Arabic
77	French	French	French / Chinese

Table 16. Linguistic composition of couples (18) and (77).

In the case of (18) and (77), Arabic and Chinese are spoken by the children despite not having any specific link with the language. (18), however, states having a “beginner” level in Arabic. In this case, two scenarios are possible. The parent speaks to the child in Arabic, and then indicated that the child speaks the language with the basics the parent has in Arabic, the child may also follow classes in Arabic, or an external source in the family may speak to the child in Arabic. In any cases, it is probable that the parent has an

interest for the language and considers important to transmit the language to the child. The case of (77) is quite different since none of the parents master Chinese. They must have decided to enroll the child in Chinese classes to make the child speak the language. What these instances demonstrate is that other languages are also sought-after, and parents decide to act by transmitting them to their children. Indeed, both Chinese and Arabic are supercentral languages and certainly allow a wide range communication.

5.2. Methodological Considerations

Many methodological points need to be highlighted for potential improvements and necessary qualifications.

At first, the number of informants that were used in this survey must be kept in mind. Even though our untreated pool of informants was broader, I decided to consider only the data of the participants that completed the survey at a rate of at least 75%. This condition guaranteed me homogeneity in the degree of answers, but considerably restricted the final sample. As stated before, this policy led me to discuss the results of 79 informants; even if this result is still a great number, it does not necessarily allow me to get a representation as broad as expected of the Geneva population. Also, although, the results obtained are convincing in terms of collected answers, a better scattering of the study could have been done. Among our informants, there are many couples with an academic level, so our study is unbalanced in terms of results since we only have a fringe of the population. These targeting problems also influence the number of languages we could elicit for our study. Related to this problematic, our study also lacks the data of “vulnerable” populations such as recent immigrants who may lack knowledge of the questionnaire’s language.

The formulation of some of our questions can also be discussed. Indeed, some parents may have had a different understanding of our questions. When asked what languages their child speaks, some parents may have decided to indicate that their child speaks a language while the language was just learnt at school, whereas some others did the opposite and indicated that the child does not know a language while it is learnt at school. This misunderstanding may distort the results of the language mastered by the children because of the answers provided to the question.

Also, some questions that would have allowed us to collect precise information were missing in the first wave. It is for example the case with the languages that parents would like their children to master, or the motivations that explain why parents have sent their children to private schools. Although this information was present in the second wave, the first wave and its 67 respondents do not contain this information and cuts us from an indicative answer.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion of this work, **I can state that Hypothesis 2: Children master other language(s) and the native language(s) of their parents is the hypothesis that prevails in Geneva in 2022.** Table 4 summarizes the language transmission rates and demonstrates this result. All languages are strongly transmitted when at least one of the parents is a native speaker of the idiom. The reasons that prevail in these cases are very often reasons of communication with the family and relatives.

When the language is the language of both parents, in all cases, the language will be transmitted since it allows the members of the nuclear family to share the same native language but will also permit the child to communicate with the relatives. The idea of communication with the family is the argument that stands out the most when the language is passed on by at least one of the parents. However, this result does not indicate any value of the language since it is already in the family repertoire. Category C) is the category that can best indicate a potential transmission value. It turns out that English appears to be the most valuable of our four languages since it is mastered by the most children that have no initial links with the language:

Economic and large-scale communication reasons can be invoked this time since English is a hypercentral language. German, although presented as important in the Swiss market by Grin (1999), is not as sought-after in Geneva as English. The fact that English tends to stand more and more as a *lingua franca* for Swiss people can be a reason for that situation. However, the fact that just one child masters German despite the lack of heritage relations with the idiom does not diminish the value of the language in the employment market. Indeed, in Geneva there are great odds that the language ends up being mastered

by children thanks to the Geneva school system. Spanish would be the third language with the most value in Geneva. Studies do not present the language as especially important or advantaging in Switzerland, but Spanish still enjoys a value of widely used language, only one child ends up mastering the language despite having parents not natively related to that language. Finally, Portuguese ends the ranking. No families initially not related to the language has a child that ends up mastering the language. Again, even though the language may be a sought-after at the international level, the language does not present these advantages on a Swiss scale. The extra observation section permitted to see that other unexpected languages in this study, such as Arabic or Chinese, are also sought-after by parents and do possess a certain value for the parents.

Hence, in a world increasingly turned towards the international, extra-communicative language learning seems to be on the agenda more and more and is not expected to stop in the next few years. This work provided a basis for the study of bilingualism on a Genevan scale. If the work is limited to one topic, the corpus of data we have collected would hopefully allow for further investigation of other areas of bilingualism in Geneva.

7. Acknowledgments

It seems natural to me to express my thanks to the people who, through their support, kindness, and attention, made the writing and realization of this work possible. It is therefore with grateful thoughts that I turn to these people and thank them warmly.

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9. Appendices

1. François Grin's chart. The average income by English proficiency level in the Swiss French-speaking part (Grin, 1999, 135).

Level in English (1–4)	Average gross income
1	6461 CHF
2	5452 CHF
3	4988 CHF
4	4493 CHF
Difference between 1-4	1968 CHF
Correlation	0.271
Average income	5082 CHF

2. François Grin's chart. The average income by German proficiency level in the Swiss French-speaking part (Grin, 1999, 135).

Level in German (1–4)	Average gross income
1	6230 CHF
2	5778 CHF
3	4814 CHF
4	4589 CHF
Difference between 1–4	1641 CHF
Correlation	0.231
Average income	5068 CHF ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ With German, Grin only offers the average income for all the geographical regions.

3. English Flyer

Children and Languages

If you are parent of a child who:

- is aged between 4 and 12
- attends school in the canton of Geneva
- speaks one, two or three+ languages

You can help us!

The University of Geneva is currently studying parents' perception of bilingualism in young children aged 4 to 12 years old. We would love to hear your opinion on the matter! Please fill in our survey (20' MAX).

CONTACTS:

Gavish.Kawol@etu.unige.ch
Alexis.Perillo@etu.unige.ch

**Scan the code
to access the survey!**



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**
FACULTÉ DES LETTRES



4. French Flyer

Les enfants et les langues

Si vous êtes parent d'un enfant:

- qui a entre 4 et 12 ans
- qui est scolarisé dans le canton de Genève
- qui parle une, deux ou plus de trois langues

Alors vous pouvez nous aider!

L'Université de Genève mène actuellement une étude sur la perception parentale du bilinguisme chez les jeunes enfants de 4 à 12 ans. Nous écouterions volontiers votre avis sur le sujet! Pour se faire, nous vous demandons de remplir un sondage (20'MAX).

CONTACTS:

Gavish.Kawol@etu.unige.ch
Alexis.Perillo@etu.unige.ch

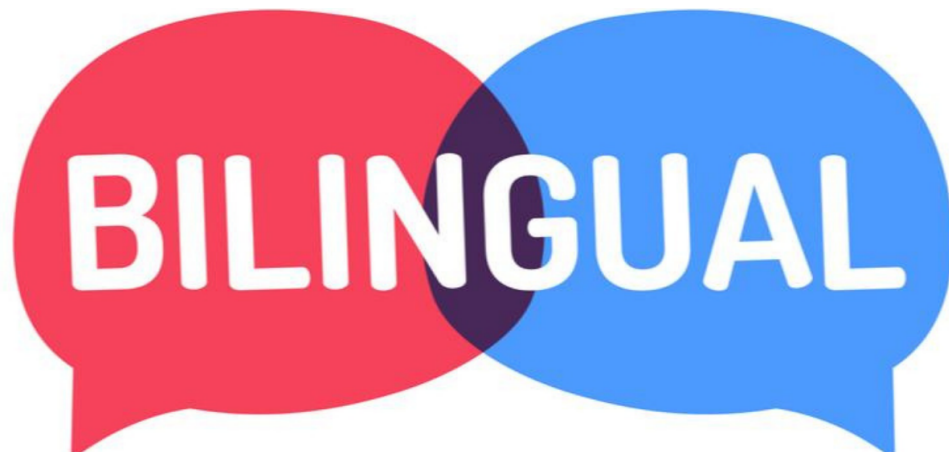


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**Veillez scanner le code
pour répondre au
sondage!**



5. English Poster



If you have a child who:

- is aged between 4 and 12
- attends school in the canton of Geneva
- speaks one, two or three+ languages

YOU CAN HELP US!

The University of Geneva is currently studying parental perception of bilingualism in young children (aged 4 to 12 years old). We would love to hear your opinion on the matter! Please fill in our survey (20' MAX).

Click here to fill in the survey!

https://psicologiaunimib.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_29N7HOq28nUzZrg

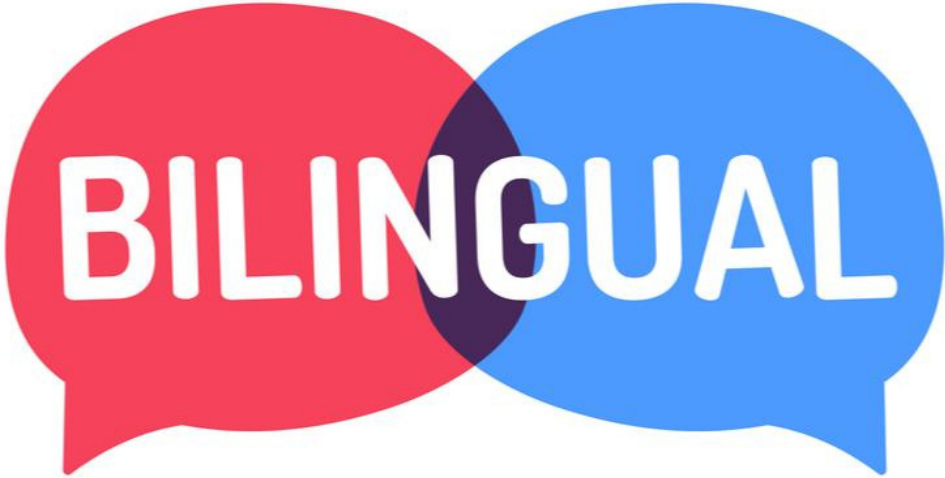


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6. French Poster



BILINGUAL

Si vous avez un enfant:

- qui a entre 4 et 12 ans
- qui est scolarisé dans le canton de Genève
- qui parle une, deux ou plus de trois langues

ALORS VOUS POUVEZ NOUS AIDER!

L'Université de Genève mène actuellement une étude sur la perception parentale du bilinguisme chez les jeunes enfants (de 4 à 12 ans). Nous écouterions volontiers votre avis sur le sujet! Pour se faire, nous vous demandons de remplir un sondage (20'MAX).

Cliquez ici pour accéder au sondage!

https://psicologiaunimib.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2rH6KjbG07plxDE



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7. Mail template

Bonjour,

Nous nous permettons de vous écrire dans le cadre de notre travail de Master au sein du département d'anglais de l'Université de Genève. Nous menons une recherche visant à comprendre comment des parents habitant le canton décident d'éduquer linguistiquement leur(s) enfant(s). Ainsi, nous aimerions pouvoir avoir l'avis de parents à travers un questionnaire en ligne d'une quinzaine-vingtaine de minutes. Puisque votre institution voit régulièrement venir des parents, nous aurions aimé pouvoir laisser nos questionnaires dans votre centre afin que des parents intéressés puissent nous aider - en pièce jointe, un aperçu du document en question. Les parents doivent juste scanner un code et répondent directement depuis leur téléphone. Une réponse positive aiderait considérablement notre recherche.

Nous restons à disposition pour toutes questions.

En vous souhaitant une bonne journée.

Bien cordialement,

Alexis Perillo

Téléphone : +41 76 511 71 10

Mail: Alexis.Perillo@etu.unige.ch

8. Distribution per couple of the languages analyzed in this study

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced-Intermediate	Informant: Elementary-Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced-Intermediate	Partner: Elementary-Beginner	Language spoken by the child
1	Finnish	English / Swedish / Italian					Finnish / English / German / French
2	English	French	Spanish	French	English		English / French
4	German	English / French / Spanish / Malayalam	Arabic	English	French / German		English / French / German
5	Spanish	English / French		French	English / Spanish / Portuguese		French / Spanish
6	Turkish	English	French	Turkish	French / English		Turkish / English / French
7	English	Japanese	Chinese / French	Japanese	English, Chinese / French		Japanese / English

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced- Intermediate	Informant: Elementary- Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced- Intermediate	Partner: Elementary- Beginner	Language spoken by the child
8	Russian	English	German / French	Russian	English / French	German	Russian / French / English
9	Greek	English / French	German	Greek	French / English	German	Greek / French
10	French	English		English		French	English / French
11	Slovak	English / Czech / Russian / French	German	English	French		French / English
12	English	Thai, Gujarati / Hindi / French		Swiss- German	French, English		English / French / Swiss- German
13	English	French	German / Portuguese	French / Fula	English	Spanish	French / English
16	Portuguese	Spanish / English	French	Portuguese	French / English Spanish		Portuguese / French

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced-Intermediate	Informant: Elementary-Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced-Intermediate	Partner: Elementary-Beginner	Language spoken by the child
18	Swiss German / German	French / English / Italian	Spanish / Arabic				Swiss German / French / Arabic
19	English	French					English / French
21	Spanish	English / French	Portuguese / Italian	French	English / Spanish / Turkish	German, Portuguese	French / Spanish
25	Polish	English / French					Polish / French
26	German	English, French / Spanish		English	French		French / German / English
27	French	English	German / Spanish	French	German English	Spanish	French
29	French	English	German / Spanish	French	English / German / Spanish		French
30	French / Hebrew	English / Spanish		French	English		French / Hebrew / English

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced-Intermediate	Informant: Elementary-Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced-Intermediate	Partner: Elementary-Beginner	Language spoken by the child
31	Dutch	English / French / German		Dutch	English / French		Dutch / French
32	English	Italian / French					English / French
34	Danish	English / French					English / French / Danish
35	Russian	English / French		Russian, French	English / German	Spanish	Russian / French
36	Hindi	English	French	Bengali	English / Hindi		Bengali / French / English
37	Lithuanian	French / English / Russian	Spanish / Italian	English	French / Portuguese		French / English
38	English	French		French	English		English / French
39	English	French	Portuguese / Vietnamese / Spanish	Portuguese	French / English / Spanish	German	English / Portuguese / French
40	English	French / Italian	Spanish	English	French	Italian	English / French

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced-Intermediate	Informant: Elementary-Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced-Intermediate	Partner: Elementary-Beginner	Language spoken by the child
41	English	Spanish	French	English	Afrikaans	French	English / French
42	English	French		English / Spanish	French		English / French
43	Norwegian / Swedish / English	French	German / Spanish				English / French / Norwegian
53	Russian	English	French	Russian	English	French	Russian / English / French
58	German / Spanish / Swedish / English	French	Portuguese, Italian / Arabic / Bahasa Indonesia	English	French / Spanish / Portuguese	German / Swedish / Arabic	English / Spanish / French / German
59	English	French / German	Spanish	German	English / French	Italian	French / English / German
60	Italian / French	English / Spanish	Swedish	Swedish / English	French / Italian		French / Italian / Swedish / English

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced- Intermediate	Informant: Elementary- Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced- Intermediate	Partner: Elementary- Beginner	Language spoken by the child
61	Italian	French / English		Italian	English	French	French / Italian
62	Spanish	French / English		Spanish / French	English / German	Italian	French / Spanish
63	Italian / Ticino dialect	French / English	German	Italian	French / English / German		Italian / French
64	French	Italian / English / German		Italian	French / English	German	French / Italian
65	French	English	Urdu	French	English		French / English
66	French	English		English / Malay	French		French
67	German	French / English / Swiss German / Russian / Polish / Czech / Slovak	Spanish / Italian / Romansch / Ukrainian	French	English	German	French / German
68	French	English / Italian / German		Italian	French / English	German	French / Italian

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced- Intermediate	Informant: Elementary- Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced- Intermediate	Partner: Elementary- Beginner	Language spoken by the child
69	French			French			French
70	French	English / German / Arabic		French	English		French
71	Italian	French / English	German	Italian	French / English		Italian / French
72	French	English		French	English		French / English
73	Greek	English	French	Greek	English		Greek / French
74	French	English / German	Mandarin / Spanish	French	English	German / Spanish	French
75	French	English	German / Spanish	French	English	German	French
77	French	Italian / Spanish	Portuguese	French	German / Italian		French / Chinese
78	French	English / German		French	English / German		French
79	Brazilian	French / English / Spanish	German	French	English / Brazilian	German	Brazilian / French

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced- Intermediate	Informant: Elementary- Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced- Intermediate	Partner: Elementary- Beginner	Language spoken by the child
81	Polish	English / French / Italian					English
82	Spanish	French / English	Italian	Spanish	English / French / Italian	German	Spanish / French
83	French	English / Russian / German		Russe	French	English	French / Spanish
84	French	English / German		English / French	German		English / French
85	Chinese	French	English	French	English / Chinese		French / Chinese
86	French / English	Portuguese / Spanish / German		French	English / German		English / French / Spanish
88	Spanish	French / English	Portuguese / Italian	French	English / Spanish	German	French / English / Spanish
89	French	Spanish / English	German	Spanish	French / English / Italian / Portuguese		French / Spanish / English

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced- Intermediate	Informant: Elementary- Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced- Intermediate	Partner: Elementary- Beginner	Language spoken by the child
90	Italian	French / English	German	French / Italian	English	German	Italian / French
91	Italian	French / English / Russian	German / Spanish / Chinese	French	English	Allemand	French / Italian
92	German	French / English	Spanish	French	English	Spanish	German / French
94	Catalan / Spanish	French / English		Catalan / Spanish	English	French	Catalan / English / French / Spanish
95	English		French	English		French	English / French
97	Espagnol	English / French / German		French	Spanish / English		French / Spanish
98	Amharic		French				French / Amharic
99	Albanian	French / English	German	Albanian	English / French		Albanian / French / English
100	French	English	Spanish	Portuguese	French		French / Portuguese

Number of the couple	Informant: Native	Informant: Advanced-Intermediate	Informant: Elementary-Beginner	Partner: Native	Partner: Advanced-Intermediate	Partner: Elementary-Beginner	Language spoken by the child
101	Spanish	French / English / German	Italian / Portuguese	German	Spanish / French / English		French / German
102	Portuguese	French	English / Spanish	Portuguese	French		French / Portuguese
104	French / Spanish / Portuguese	English / German		Spanish / English	French		French / Spanish / Portuguese
105	Spanish	French / Latin / German	English	Spanish	French / English	German / Latin	French / Spanish
106	Albanian		French / Spanish / English	Albanian		Serbian / Croatian / English / French / Spanish	French / Albanian
107	Albanian			Albanian			French / Albanian
108	Albanian	French / Dutch / English	Spanish / Turkish	Albanian	Français	English / Italian	French / Albanian